



You Shall Receive Power When The Holy Spirit Has Come Upon You

An address for the Pentecost Meritus Mass

31st May 2009 ● Rev Robert John

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him ...

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

*After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and **handed down** his spirit ... [Then later ...]*

On the evening of that day [i.e. the day of resurrection], the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 19:17-18a, 25b-30 (amended); 20:19-23

So when they had come together, ... [Jesus] said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed with his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" ...

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance ...

And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it

is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and on my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." ...

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:6a, 7b-8a; 2:1-6, 12-24, 37-38

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, a feast which brings to a conclusion the spiritual festival of Easter. The bestowal of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon each one of us was realised through the events of the Easter mysteries. Pentecost is the culmination and fulfilment of these mysteries. And in a sense, then, Pentecost is the realisation of the purpose of Christ's incarnation. Christ could do no more than make the Spirit available to us. All that lies beyond Pentecost requires our co-operation, our engagement and our participation.

We have reached a turning point in the cycle of the spiritual year. Christ and the spiritual worlds have done their work to make available to each of us the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. From here on in, it depends upon us. Can we open ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit? Can we work with the gifts it offers to us, the abilities it unlocks within us? And can our very beings and lives bring forth the fruits of the spirit that grow through our ability to work co-operatively, collaboratively with the impulses the Spirit brings us?

The Greek word 'Pentecost' refers to the *fiftieth* day after Easter, the fiftieth day after the day of resurrection. Prior to the Easter mysteries, the Jews also celebrated an annual feast called Pentecost. This Jewish festival was originally one of the pilgrim festivals of the old covenant celebrating the first fruits of the corn or wheat harvest, and it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover. The Jewish feast of Pentecost was also associated with the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Both these associations can add light to our understanding of our celebration of the spiritual feast of Pentecost. In place of the law being given, we see the disciples experiencing the dynamic power of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in his letters, frequently contrasts what it means for Christed individuals to live according to the dynamic working of the spirit rather than the constraints and strictures of the law. And the disciples, in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, become the harvest, the fruitfulness resulting from Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection.

Ability: The Power of the Spirit

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." (Acts 1:8)

The Greek word for 'power' is *dunamis*, from which we have the word 'dynamic'. The power of the Holy Spirit is that within us which is active, potent, moving, changing, lively, motivated, energetic, vibrant, forceful, full of life, vigorous.

In the Greek, *dunamis* is a very precise and yet difficult word. It appears often in the Bible and while it is translated in diverse ways, the most important meaning it conveys is the concept of ability, ableness. In other words it is the "I can!" When we use it in a negative context it's translated as cannot. For instance, Christ says, "I cannot serve God and mammon." The power that is given cannot be used in this particular way. So *dunamis*, power, means ability, ableness, the I CAN.

Through Christ we know the I AM. Through receiving the Spirit we know the I CAN. We learn that we are able.

Unless we have the ability, the *dunamis*, we cannot perform the deed, whether it be on a physical, mental or spiritual level. So the Spirit is connected with action, with doing; whilst the Christ, the I AM is connected with being. It is interesting that the Spirit guides and leads us to the truth, the reality of the I AM. The I CAN leads us to knowledge and experience of the I AM.

So, in terms of us thinking about how the Spirit is working within us and where it is leading us, we need to be thinking of our abilities. What we are able to do. What we can do. The Spirit enables us. It gives us ability. It makes the able more able.

This concept of I CAN of course involves our will. I can, but will I? It involves, choice, decision, determination. The Holy Spirit doesn't control us. It assists us. It is therefore a partnership, a co-operation. If we enter into a situation then the Holy Spirit will strengthen us and enable us. If we do not enter in, then it cannot enable and empower us. So a certain daringness is required of us in order to discover the power of the Holy Spirit.

The more we experience this power, this enabling, then the more bold we become, the more we learn we can rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. The more we do, then the more we know I CAN. And the more we know the I CAN, the more we come to know and experience our I AMness.

We learn about the Holy Spirit, about the gifts of the spirit and the powers of the spirit, by using our abilities.

The working of the Holy Spirit in us empowers us with certain abilities.

Unity

The first thing we see is the ability, the power or the *dunamis*, to become united. The Holy Spirit is a unifier and the means by which we can recognise one another as divine and worthy beings. This power was given at the first Pentecost day and has been growing ever since. An increase in unity is taking place all over the world.

A careful reading of the first ten chapters of the book of Acts will make clear the fact that the apostles, especially Paul, worked towards the unity of the races.

Despite the fact that we sometimes feel very separate, the human race is growing towards unity and understanding. The barriers of blood relationships, tribal consciousness, the obstacles of tongues and language, culture, colour and race are disappearing. All of this is pictured in the first event of Pentecost when so many different races could hear and understand the apostles in their own language and where the apostles travelled and brought new knowledge to different countries.

Thinking Expression

The second gift or ability that is apparent is the gift of thinking, understanding, interpreting and expressing. We see this very clearly in the Book of Acts, where suddenly the apostles understand the Christ and his mission and are able to convey this with intelligent words to the people around them. Through the event of Pentecost, the spirit of Christ, the divine word, descended upon this earth and was able to enter our human constitution. This spirit now dwells in us and gives us the ability – *dunamis* – to think and understand in terms of the spirit and to express this intelligently, so it can be communicated to others.

This gift enables us to be interested, informed and to assist others. It gives us a new perspective and spiritual point of view. It enables us to release ourselves from the past, from guilt, from sin and negativity and to press on. It is our intelligence and thinking that do this. And we see this ability in growing measure throughout the world.

The Ability to Love

The third gift or ability given to us through the event of Pentecost and which is so apparent and yet perhaps unnamed in the Book of Acts, is the ability to love. Love was the great motivator of the apostles and their journeys. Love for Christ and love for people. Two thousand years later we still do not know the reality of love in all its fullness, but we do know that if we were to take love away from the world then there would be nothing much left over. And nothing much would be done. Increasingly we see love for people and the world being a great motivational force, a shaping and changing force in this world.

Love balances the negative forces we see working within ourselves and within the world. We recognize that no human being is born without the ability – the *dunamis* – to love and to express love. And while the concept of love was limited and vague before the incarnation of the Christ into this world, since his spirit has pervaded human consciousness love has increasingly become an action, a deed, that supersedes these limitations.

So the ability to connect and unify, the ability to think, understand and express, and the ability to love more and more – these are the workings of the Holy Spirit within individual human beings and throughout the whole human race over the last two thousand years.

Perhaps we take these gifts for granted, perhaps we think they have always been present, but they are in fact divine gifts, from the spirit, given so that we can realize the Christ, the I AM, within each one. The spirit is always working to reveal the Christ.

Through the workings of the Spirit we are able to do these things, and we also have the opportunity. We have the means. That is, in all these areas, we have a choice. Will we cooperate with the Spirit to connect? Will we work collaboratively with the Spirit to unify, to think, to express, to love?

Enabling: The Gift of the Spirit

Paul also sets out for us other gifts of the Spirit. The ability to:

- Speak and express knowledge with wisdom
- Heal
- Prophecy
- Speak in tongues
- Interpret tongues
- Discern spirits
- Serve
- Teach

- Exhort
- Contribute
- Help
- Work miracles; and
- Be merciful

The Holy Spirit is the enabler, and in the process of being enabled we learn something. We receive knowledge about a particular expression that we can use to make the Christ more real, to ourselves and to others. These gifts are many and varied.

In the Old Testament we read that the enabling of the Holy Spirit assumed certain forms. In the New Testament it assumed other forms. We each know of other expressions of the working of the Holy Spirit through the experience of our own lives. There are many ways in which the Holy Spirit comes to us and works in our lives.

The Fruit of the Spirit

I'm very grateful for the times I've experienced the Holy Spirit at work in my life. I think I could probably say that one of the fruits of those experiences has been to open my eyes to a different or new reality. It has prompted me to a different way of being or acting. Sometimes this has been gentle and unfolding, and other times it has been immediate and in a way shocking.

So, I see that there is an experience of the Holy Spirit enabling me to do something and the fruit of this, for me, has been to open my eyes, to give me a new vision. So, there is the gift, that which is enabling – and then there is also the fruit.

The fruit of the spirit is different to the gifts of the spirit. St Paul speaks of this in his Letter to the Galatians where he says:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience or long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23*

These are some of the qualities, the fruits that grow within us as a result of us actively, co-operatively, collaboratively working with the Spirit. These **fruits** assist us personally; whereas the **gifts** of the spirit, the enabling or empowering, is often for those around us – to enable us to do or give something for the community or world at large.

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning of this address, Pentecost marks a turning point in the cycle of the spiritual year. Christ and the spiritual worlds have done their work to make available to each of us the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. From here on in, it depends upon us. Can we open ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit? Can we work with the gifts it offers to us, the abilities it unlocks within us? And can our very beings and lives bring forth the fruits of the spirit that grow through our ability to work co-operatively, collaboratively with the impulses the Spirit brings?

This turning point in the cycle of the spiritual year is signified by the extinguishing and removal of the Paschal candle. The gift, the impetus has been given, and through our work during the Mystical Interval we have had the opportunity to appropriate and integrate that spiritual light within our being. Now we must generate light and life through collaboratively working with the abilities imbued by the Spirit.

Today we move into ordinary time (i.e. the part of the spiritual year that is not Advent, Lent or the Mystical Interval). During ordinary time we must do the work and not be so dependent upon the spiritual worlds and beings. And in ordinary time the altar flowers change to a predominance of yellow (perhaps with a little white) to remind us that we must use our thinking ability, our intelligence, our enlightened and enlivened consciousness to become co-operative colleagues with the Spirit.

More and more, as we are enabled and empowered through our ability to receive and embody the Spirit, we discover that indeed we can. And the more we can live and act co-operatively, collaboratively with the Spirit, the more we come to know and experience our I AMness. And we take up the work of making Christ present again in this earth – in our thoughts, words and actions, in our very being.

*O love of God, a mystery unfathomed,
In Christ to all the world made known;
Within our hearts this love is waking
And through our deeds its power is shown.*

*O love of Christ, all souls uniting
Beyond the bounds of creed or race;
We pledge our lives to live that vision
Till all we do proclaims your grace.*

*O love, all human hearts now filling,
A new creation brought to birth;
Within that life we stand together –
The love of God revealed on earth.*

So shall it be.

Collect for Pentecost

Father of light, from whom every good gift comes,
send your Spirit into our lives with the power of a mighty wind,
and by the flame of your wisdom open the horizons of our minds.
Loosen our tongues to sing your praise in words beyond the power of speech,
for without your Spirit we could never raise our voice in words of peace
or announce the truth that is Christ our Lord,
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
So shall it be.

Prayer of Intention for Pentecost

Come, true light.
Come, life eternal.
Come, hidden mystery.
Come, treasure without name.

Come, reality beyond all words.
Come, person beyond all understanding.
Come, rejoicing without end.
Come, light that knows no evening.

Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.
Come, raising of the fallen.
Come, resurrection of the dead.
Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly you create, refashion
and change all things by your will alone.

Come, for your name fills our hearts with longing,
and is ever on our lips.
Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me.
Come, my breath and my life.
Come, the consolation of my humble soul.

Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.
Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

So shall it be.

Excerpts from *An Invocation to the Holy Spirit* by St. Symeon

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