

Pentecost (C)

5th June 2022

'The Pentecost-Spirit's gifts: for departure and moving on'

Acts 2: the Pentecost experience

Ps 103: *Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth*

1Cor 12: *a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit*

Jn 14: *The Holy Spirit will teach you everything.*

Easter, as I'm sure you've noticed, is a *movable* feast, ranging across about a 5-week period from year to year, as did the Jewish Passover, according to the phases of the moon ... and so too, therefore, does Pentecost — the 'Feast of Weeks' as the Jews called it, 7 weeks after Passover, a feast that recalled the covenant on Sinai which followed on from the Exodus initiated that first Passover night. Pentecost for us Christians, then, is the 50th (and last!) day of Easter, 7 weeks after the great festival of Jesus's glorious rising from the dead. As a movable feast, therefore, Pentecost can vary in date over some 5 weeks from early May to mid June. Happily for us, I would suggest, this year its timing is *perfect*. Precisely as we begin to say 'goodbye' to some of you students this week, sending you out at the end of your academic year — and for some of you at the end of your degree or even your academic *life!* — we're celebrating that feast that is all

about *mission*, the going-out from Jerusalem and into the world, filled with the power of the Gospel.

What an ideal feast, then, on which to start saying 'farewell' to those of you going home for the summer vacation, or even leaving London after several years of your university degree(s). How much, at this point of departing — whether for summer, or for ever! — do you need keenly to turn to the Lord and seek His blessing, His spiritual outpouring on a time of change and of moving on! As the Twelve needed that promised fire of the Holy Spirit, in order to make their transition from disciples to apostles (from 'followers' to 'those sent,' from hiding away to being missionaries), you also are in great need of the Spirit's outpouring to consecrate your next moves, especially for those of you going, perhaps with trepidation, into the world of work; or maybe with concerns over getting a job in a place and a company you'd like; and with getting somewhere to live beyond the student accommodation and facilities you've been used to. All sorts of big decisions, and new ventures; as ever, all these

things need to be referred to the Lord for His blessing. “Unload all your worries on to Him, since He is looking after you,” said St Peter!

Now, I know that not all of you yet have these specific concerns — it’s still exam time for some of you, I know, and then it’s ‘just the summer holidays’ for many of you! — but, still, the need, daily, for the Spirit’s gifts, is important to each of us. So, this Pentecost, let’s meditate on those rich and precious spiritual gifts for which we should be praying. What is it that you most need, today, as you are facing the summer? What is your most urgent and passionate prayer this Pentecost?

Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom: Yes, we certainly need our minds to be filled with that intellectual and spiritual conviction that our faith is true and is the guiding principle of our life. As practising Catholics, we are still in need of these gifts: an inner Knowledge of the facts of God’s actions in the world, especially in Jesus’s ministry; an Understanding of how these fit together as a spiritual whole, making sense of the world; and a Wisdom which I see as the over-arching spiritual acceptance that God’s goodness drives the

world, i.e. that He has a plan that is loving of creation, and loving of each person. With the Spirit’s gifts of Knowledge, Understanding and Wisdom, I am fortified with a certainty that only God in Jesus Christ brings me the greatest truth about the cosmos, humanity, and my life!

Counsel (Right Judgment): next comes Right Judgment, that is, the capacity to choose correctly, spiritually, with a reliance on the Spirit to guide those decisions. At a time of change, leaving university, for example, it’s a much-needed gift. ‘The world is your oyster,’ yes, and yet so many considerations also hem one in — so many choices, and yet so many conditions. It’s a good prayer at this point to seek the Holy Spirit’s precious gift of discernment, right judgment, counsel. Our Lord Jesus often speaks of His promised Holy Spirit as ‘the Paraclete,’ in other words, the Counsellor, the one who advocates for us, speaks for us and guides us. Whenever we’re making decisions, be they little, daily ones or big, life-changing ones, we can and should invoke the Holy Spirit, as there’s no better counsellor. Every decision, then, can be couched in prayer to the Spirit: Lord, may I choose rightly in every instance.

Fortitude (Courage): then there’s the much-needed gift of Courage. How dearly we need this! Especially, perhaps, as

we emerge from the relative security of our tertiary education, with its joys of learning, community, and chaplaincy! Courage was a key gift for the apostles, as they learnt that the call was for them to “go to the whole world, proclaim the good news” after Pentecost. How much they needed that Courage, in the face of all that had happened to Jesus only weeks before, to go out and do as He had done, proclaiming fearlessly the truth of His message. We also need Courage to be open, fearless, compassionate Catholics, known for our faith and not afraid to practise our faith openly. As some of you move into secular settings, for living & working, you will need Courage to be faithful Catholics. Do not doubt that this gift of the Spirit is there for you in abundance, if you pray for it.

Piety (Holiness): The gift of Holiness is the Spirit’s conviction in us of the need for prayer at the centre of our lives. We all know how the devil whittles away incessantly at our desire to spend time in prayer. The gift of the Spirit, that of Piety, is the antidote to that, keeping us generous in allotting time to the Lord. As life gets busier, as maybe we take on stressful and time-consuming careers, so prayer can all too easily be side-lined. In order to keep our faith alive, fruitfully and fervently, we absolutely must have that devotion to Prayer

and the Sacraments, a dedicated and conscious Holiness that is the gift of the Spirit. Time set aside for prayer, silence, and devotion, thanks to the inspiration of the Spirit, provides the backbone to a holy life well lived.

Fear of the Lord (Awe & Wonder): the final of the 7 gifts of the Spirit, as traditionally enumerated, is the Fear of the Lord. That’s a phrase that harks back to the wonderful language of the Old Testament, and which expresses succinctly that attitude of Awe and Wonder at God’s majesty. If we are to be drawn to seek an integral Wisdom, practise regular Piety, exercise truly Right Judgment, and be spiritually Courageous, then we need to have that sense of why we are doing these things at all ... And why are we? Because God is God! God is majestic, the divine Creator, Lover and Giver of all things. Yes, we really need to be filled with that primary gift of Fear of the Lord, sensing His Awesome benevolence; not ‘afraid’ of Him in the sense of crippling fear of displeasing Him or being paralysed by our sins, but with a reverence that acknowledges the first place that He should have in our thoughts, plans, and hopes for life.

So, which of those gifts of the Holy Spirit is the one that most urgently you need to pray for this Pentecost? Do

so, now! ... Is it **Knowledge-Understanding-Wisdom**? Is it **Right Judgment**? Is it **Courage**? Is it **Holiness**? Is it **Fear of the Lord**? Which is it, that you need most, as this summer commences, ... or the end of university looms? Do not be afraid! The Lord promised the Holy Spirit, and He, the personal divine Spirit of Father & Son came in such abundance on the first Pentecost. But every Pentecost can be a new Pentecost! Every Christian's day can be a new Pentecost, for the Spirit is our birth-right as ones reborn in Baptism! Ask for that Gift, that Gift of gifts which is the Spirit's legacy — does not the Lord say, repeatedly and directly, to us, “*Ask, and you shall receive ... How much will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*” (Mt 5 / Lk 11). May this blessed feastday, this sacred day of Pentecost, be for you a joyous day of trusting prayer for the gifts of the Spirit, for what you need from God, at this time of your life. May we end Eastertide today on a high, invigorated by the Spirit's promise to come when invited, when implored, when needed ... and make us good Catholics, faithful Christians,

courageous ambassadors for the Gospel wherever He may send us.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If any man is thirsty, let Him come to Me! Let the man come and drink who believes in Me.” As Scripture says, “From His breast shall flow fountains of living water.” He was speaking of the Spirit, which those who believe in Him were to receive. (Jn 7: 37–39)

Veni, Sancte Spiritus! — Come, Holy Spirit, fills the hearts of Your faithful! Amen.