

Pentecost Sunday (A)

24<sup>th</sup> May 2026

'Veni, Sancte Spiritus'

Acts 2: Pentecost day

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

1Cor 12: *variety of gifts*

Jn 20: *receive the Holy Spirit!*

After these beautiful 7 wks of Eastertide — for many of you, also ‘examtide’ taking up so much of your attention — we come to this final *triumphal* feast of the season, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We’ve heard the extraordinary account in the *Acts of the Apostles*, ch. 2, in which St Luke describes — or, perhaps, *struggles* to describe — that awesome spiritual event (almost *beyond* words) that enveloped Our Lady and the Apostles and others, that Pentecost morning. The Holy Spirit’s coming was *exciting* and *empowering*, filling them with courage and conviction and charisms that would carry them to the ends of the world with the Gospel.

Something I’ve rarely done at Pentecost, is to celebrate the *extended* rite of the Vigil Mass. I once did it during Covid when my Indian priest confrère & I alone celebrated Pentecost. There’s a long preliminary Liturgy of the Word with 4 OT readings, from the books of

Genesis & Exodus, and the prophets Ezekiel & Joel, which set the scene for Pentecost: they express the work of the Spirit of God in those centuries of Israel before Jesus, our desperate need for the power of God reaching out to humanity in order to sanctify our human race ... Yet so much was still to come, so much greater promised. Joel in particular has powerful words of prophecy: “*Thus says the Lord — ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men see visions ...’*” That promise comes to its fulfilment when the first members of the Church are anointed with spiritual gifts and sacred power in that upper room in Jerusalem. God desires to prolong the saving work of Christ in the world by anointing ‘other Christs,’ *Christians*, with His Holy Spirit.

It might be worth taking a step back and asking: “What *is* the Holy Spirit?” Maybe we’re not always very clear about the answer to that question. It can seem a bit intangible. Well, for a start, the Holy Spirit is not a “What” but a “Who.” The Holy Spirit is as equally God as

is the Father and the Son; He is a divine *person*, the third person of the Holy Trinity. But it's understandable that we struggle a bit to grasp the essence of the Holy Spirit, I think. Probably we have, in our mind's eye, a sort-of image or metaphor of the *Father*: venerable, fatherly, majestic, all-powerful. We easily, too, have a mental image of the *Son*, God in His incarnate form, Jesus of Nazareth, walking the dusty streets of Galilee villages, and strung up in bitter pains on the Cross outside Jerusalem. Yes, we can envisage the Father and the Son, in some way, at least, ... but the *Spirit* ...? Altogether more problematic for our little minds. Altogether more of a challenge to imagine ... which is why in fact we use so many different images for Him. Even just one verse of the famous hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus* lists at least 6 of the names for the Holy Spirit:

*Thou who art called the **Paraclete**,  
Best **gift** of God above,  
The living **spring**, the living **fire**,  
Sweet **unction** and true **love**.*

Let me list a bit more comprehensively the multiplicity of

titles and symbols that the Scriptures use to represent His divine person, and His divine action:

- the **Holy Spirit**;
- the **Paraclete** / Advocate / Counsellor / Consoler;
- the **Spirit of God**, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of the Promise, Spirit of Adoption, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of the Lord ...
- then **wind** / breath / air;
- **water** / fount / spring / dewfall;
- **fire**;
- **cloud** and shadow; and also light;
- **anointing**, and seal;
- **gift**;
- **hand of God**, or the finger of God;
- and, of course, much loved, the **dove**.

It would take a full-on academic lecture (or lecture *course*!) to try and derive all the insights possible from those many symbols and names for the Holy Spirit. They represent facets of the most pure, most powerful, irrepressible action of God in the world: directing, guiding, animating, and illuminating souls that are cleansed and brought to life in Christ. He is, in effect, our infallible inner friend. Take that unique term that Our Lord himself

uses of the Spirit, namely *Παρακλητος*, “the Paraclete” — a term that needs several English words to express its nuanced meaning as one who stands alongside us, speaks for us and pleads our cause: hence, ‘Advocate,’ ‘Counsellor,’ ‘Consoler.’ “*He is with you; He is in you!*” said Jesus to the Apostles. And what else did He say? — “*I will not leave you orphans, I will come back to you and your hearts will be full of joy*” — yes, because He has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts, so that in Him we may be able to cry out in love & praise, “*Abba, Father.*” The Spirit from Christ draws our heart into communion with the Father of Christ, draws us into the heart of the Trinity!

In fact, we might say, the Holy Spirit is the *personal bond of divine love* between Father & Son, binding them as one even when they are ‘apart’ in the mission of the incarnation; and therefore He is the *personal bond of divine love* in the Church which binds us as one even when we are apart, sent into the world, on mission. I think that this is true, that the Unity-in-God and the Mission-of-God are intimately connected: both within the Godhead and

within the Body of God’s people. Did not Jesus say, as soon as He was risen — we heard it in Jn 20, the Gospel of this feast-day — “*As the Father sent Me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit*”? It is the Spirit that unites Father & Son from all eternity, and then all through the Gospel we see the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus, binding Him to the Father as He fulfils His mission on earth. Even though the Son is ‘stretched’ out from the bosom of the Father, to do His will, yet the Spirit unites them and makes that mission fruitful. I believe it is the same for us. The very same divine Holy Spirit — the love of the Father and the Son — given to the Church first at Pentecost, both bonds us together (seals us as one), and sends us out (apart yet still united). The moment the Apostles were anointed with the Holy Spirit that Pentecost Day, they were opening the shutters; going out into the streets; they were uniting their hearers in the one human language of the Good News; and they were beginning that evangelization that will go on until the end of time.

Our prayer for the Holy Spirit, this and every

Pentecost, is for those precious gifts of *unity* and *mission*: tethered with such a divine bond of love to the Church, to one another, so as to be able with Wisdom, ... Courage, ... Piety ... and Awesome 'Fear of the Lord,' to go out to others and bring them into this same unity that we enjoy here, as worshippers in Spirit and in Truth. A traditional invocation is this prayer: '*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your love; send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.*'

Another very beautiful prayer associated with Pentecost is the liturgical Sequence set for this day: *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*. This Latin hymn was written by the great Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton (Archbp. 1207–28), the most senior Catholic in this country at a time of great tensions. King John objected forcefully to Stephen Langton's appointment as Archbishop but Pope Innocent III insisted on choosing him! He was obviously a very holy man. *Veni Sancte Spiritus* is a true glory of devotion, expressing our innermost need for, and our fervent love of,

God's most Blessed Spirit. Addressed to God the Holy Spirit, it invokes Him by name in countless ways. Let's make this prayer with all our heart today, that we may be the Spirit-filled evangelizers God wants us to be; that we be absolutely dedicated to the Unity and Mission of the Church, through being *united in faith* (not half-hearted dissenters and fault-finders) and *united in mission* (not laid back and leaving evangelization to others, and therefore to no-one!). These 13<sup>th</sup>-c. words of an English Archbishop animate and encourage us, 21<sup>st</sup>-c. Catholics from the world over: the same one faith, in the same one Spirit ...

Holy Spirit, Lord of light,  
From the clear celestial height,  
Thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, Thou Father of the poor,  
Come with treasures which endure,  
Come Thou light of all that live.

Thou of all consolers best,  
Thou the soul's delightful guest,  
Dost refreshing peace bestow.

Thou in toil art comfort sweet,  
Pleasant coolness in the heat,  
Solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, Light divine,  
Visit Thou these hearts of Thine,  
And our inmost being fill.

If Thou take Thy grace away,  
Nothing pure in man will stay;  
All his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;  
On our dryness pour Thy dew,  
Wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will;  
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;  
Guide the steps that go astray.

Thou on us who evermore  
Thee confess and Thee adore,  
With Thy sevenfold gifts descend.

Give us comfort when we die;  
Give us life with Thee on high;  
Give us joys that never end.

Archbishop Stephen Langton  
(1150–1228; Archbp of Cant. 1207–1228)