

Pentecost Sunday (B)

20th May 2018

'Did not our hearts burn within us?'

Ezek 37: *dry bones live!* or Acts 2: Pentecost day

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

Rom 8: *Spirit comes to help us in our weakness*, or Gal 5: fruits of the Spirit ...

Jn 7: *come and drink who believes in me!* or Jn 15: *Spirit leads to complete truth.*

After today, this wonderful Paschal candlestick, with its Easter Candle, will return to its customary place by the baptismal font. For the last 7 weeks, it has stood here, in the centre of the church, burning each day to remind us of the Resurrection of Jesus ... and this is the last day of Eastertide: Pentecost, the day of the Coming of the Holy Spirit, the 50th day of Easter. At the time of Jesus Pentecost was already a Jewish feast-day: counting 7 weeks from Passover, it was a celebration of God's giving of the Law after the Exodus, a real celebration of God's gifts to Israel, and kept with much celebration.

When we hear the account of the Pentecost Day after Jesus's Ascension, what we hear of is that tremendous event in the upper room for Our Lady gathered with the apostles there — Noise, Wind, Fire. All these dramatic elements are combined in the apostles' experience. I always think it sounds as if the author, St Luke, is struggling to pin down a

description of what happened to them ... Not surprising, of course, since it was a deep and moving internal experience of the Holy Spirit coming into them with new power and conviction: no wonder they struggled to describe it; it was like the overwhelming sense of a strong wind, powerful earth-shaking noise, a fire that entered into each one of them ... They truly were *on fire* with the Holy Spirit, *on fire* with love for God and for doing His Will.

These things are typical of the images of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament — Fire, Fountain of living water, Wind, Dove, Breath ... Yet the Holy Spirit is God, personally God, not a 'thing' at all. He is not a 'thing' amongst many things in the world, but a person of the one and only God. The Holy Spirit is not a 'thing' that works on us, like a medicine, but a *person* that inspires us; not a 'thing' we talk about, but a *person* whose name we want constantly on our lips. The Holy Spirit is the 3rd person of Trinity which God is: He is the love of the Father and the Son, the bond which binds together the Godhead as one and yet whom God sends into our hearts to draw us to Himself.

If we think about it, only a *person* can inspire us to do something worthwhile ... out of love, ... but a thing can't (money, car, house ...). Love for a person can change everything. This is the sort of effect that the person of the Holy Spirit can have in our life. He changed everything for the apostles ... instead of hiding in their Jerusalem room, they took to the streets, and spread across the Mediterranean and Near East to tell of Christ. They stopped being fearful of those who opposed them, and instead trusted in God. They did this because they were full of love: full of the Holy Spirit, who is the love of God poured into their hearts at Pentecost. They knew that they had the Truth: they now understood all that Jesus had taught them, because the Spirit brought them the reassurance of love that God could not deceive, and would always be faithful. They knew that wherever they went they would gain disciples, amongst Jews and amongst pagans, because the language of God is the language of love: it is universal. They would speak with one voice, the voice of Jesus Christ, through the inspiration of His Spirit, even though they spoke in many languages ...

yet they undid the confusion of former times: the one great truth is that “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus is the love of our lives, the one we must live for. Without Him we are lifeless, but with Him, we can do everything for God, we can bring Jesus to more and more people. We can do for those around us what the apostles did: speak clearly and effectively of Jesus. All that the Church has achieved over 20 centuries it has done in the power of the Spirit: all the billions of Christian believers have come to Christ through the working of the Spirit. We ‘have not seen, and yet we have believed.’ This is the Spirit powerfully at work! To speak of, and speak up for, Jesus, demands the courage and conviction that only come with the Holy Spirit really filling our hearts: we too have to be *on fire* with the Spirit. Let’s pray that this Pentecost Day can be truly a spiritual day for us, putting behind us our fears and our concerns. Let’s focus our loving and thanks in this Mass on the generous gift of the Spirit. We have received Him in our Baptism and in our Confirmation: may He guide our hearts always to closeness to Jesus, filling our hearts with spiritual joy all our days.