

Whitsunday/Pentecost A 31/05/2020

On this Whitsunday, as we celebrate the birthday of the church, I want to teach you a simple and yet potentially powerful prayer. It goes like this ... “*Veni, Spiritus Sanctus, Veni,*” or in English it is simply, “Come, Holy Spirit, come.” There is no prayer in Greek, English, Swahili, or Latin more powerful than this — “*Veni, Spiritus Sanctus, Veni.*” This prayer opens us to the Holy Spirit, who comes, fills, and leads our lives. For when the Holy Spirit appears, the miracle of new life, renewal, and *dynamis* (power) breaks loose. “Come, Holy Spirit, come!”

A ship strayed off course near Port Fairy some years ago. The ship got stuck in a reef at low tide. Five tugboats failed in their attempts to move it. Finally, the captain instructed the tugboats to leave. He decided, “I’ll just be patient and wait.” He waited and waited. Then high tide appeared. All of a sudden the Southern Ocean began to rise. The rising tide lifted the ship and placed it back into the channel. What human power could not do, the rising tide of the Great Southern Ocean did!

Something like that happened to the early church on the Day of Pentecost! The disciples and others were all together in one place — confused, unmotivated, fearful — when suddenly the tide of God rolled in! Jesus’ promise in John’s gospel was literally fulfilled on Pentecost Day. *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ... but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* — John 14:16-17, 26.

Jesus knew the disciples would forget “all I have said to you.” Jesus, knowing the tendency to get stuck or distracted by alien truths, provides a teacher who would teach and remind. This teacher/ advocate, literally, “one called to the side of,” would never, ever, allow the followers of Jesus to live without help! Like an old speech professor, the Spirit of truth whispers the secret of Pentecost into the ears and hearts and minds of Jesus’ followers. The secret of Pentecost is the gospel — the gospel, which is the good news — the story, the witness of Jesus Christ died and raised from the dead!

When Pilate, swimming in a swamp of half truths, myths, and political intrigue asks, “What is truth?” he unwittingly expresses to Jesus humanity’s eternal yearning and longing for truth. Little did Pilate realize, standing there, right in front of Pilate, was *and is* the truth! The old speech professor, the teacher, who has been around a long time, urges all to know the truth, teach the truth, and tell the truth. “Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

Today is a perfect day to give thanks to God for teachers. Many of us have been blessed with excellent teachers, mentors, and models. I attended a Church In Wales primary school for seven years. Later I was schooled and nurtured at the Bishop of Llandaff school, the University of Manchester and St Stephen’s House Oxford, and one of my favourite teachers albeit for only one semester- was professor, priest, poet, Dr. Rowan Williams, who taught us systematic theology. One thing he taught is the importance of teaching being God- centred, Christ centred and spirit lead.

I was never subjected to, nor crippled by, a bad teacher. History abounds with teachers who failed to teach well and who failed to teach the truth. Marcion was one bad egg. Marcion was declared a heretic by the early church, since he would have thrown away the Old Testament. Sabellianism is another who taught modalism, a heresy that promoted the Trinity as expressed in three separate modes. Pelagius, an Irish monk, confused salvation by trying to mix water and oil, teaching that grace needs an act of human will to be efficacious. The list of dubious teachers is long: Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, and in our own day, Warren Jeffs, and many others.

It is refreshing that Jesus promises a teacher, an instructor, an advocate, worth listening to. This instructor/advocate, the paraclete, guides Jesus’ followers into the truth. Today when you and I pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, come” we can expect the three P’s of Pentecost: *people united, power excited, and passion ignited.*

In the first place this instructor, who teaches and reminds, is worth listening to because the Spirit of truth creates *people united*. After all, they came from different countries, many different languages that first Pentecost. Galileans, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and people from Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pamphylia, Phrygia, and Judea were there. People divided by national boundaries were suddenly united! All diversity was brought together. The Holy Spirit works unity through the gospel of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

Beekeepers tell us that honeybees can only live in community. Individually, they cannot and will not survive. So it is the church of Jesus Christ is only vibrant and alive as the members live in community. “Come, Holy Spirit, come” create your *people united*! When you and I pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, come” expect the second P of Pentecost: *power excited*! After all, Jesus promised power in Acts 1:8: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you

... you will be my witnesses.”

Why be weak? Why be paralyzed? Why be stuck at low tide — marooned on life’s sandbanks? My daughter Darcey sometimes advises me. She never said, “God be with you” or “preach the gospel” but “Dad, don’t be boring.” A certain church signage advertised their air-conditioned sanctuary by the words: “It’s cool inside.” Some wit penned underneath, “Brother, you said it.” Far from cool, far from boring, that first Pentecost exploded with wind, fire, and holy breath, promising a new wild freedom, an intoxicating joy ride.

When you and I are stalled, when we feel weak, disabled, and down, the Spirit of truth functions like a set of jumper cables. We have connection. God’s gift to us, like jumper cables, is access to power, power from on high, *power excited!*

In the third place, pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, come” and expect *passion ignited!* What is it that you love to be and do? What is it in your life that energises and fulfils you? Finding your passion is more than a cliché or a fad. Finding and engaging your gifts and passion reveals God’s callings for your life. Your passion is your vocation. When you discover your passion, you also discover your path.

People united! Power excited! Passions ignited! How strong, how powerful do you and I feel today on Whitsunday morning? When it comes to our Christian faith, how often do you feel shy, insecure, and inadequate. Too often we are forgetful and tempted to follow the latest truth or fad. Thanks be to God, through the word, the sacraments, through the Holy Spirit’s teaching and reminding. We are renewed by grace, and we are able to switch the focus from ourselves to the work and action of the Holy Spirit. In glad response I sing the song of total grace, no act of my own will, to experience salvation full and free:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
and lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face
with the abundance of thy grace.
Keep far from foes, give peace at home:
where thou art guide, no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but One,
that through the ages all along,
this may be our endless song:

Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Words: Latin, ninth century;
trans. John Cosin, 1627

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