



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Receive the Holy Spirit

John 20. 19-23

Sunday 24th May

Happy Birthday! Well, may be some of you have birthdays this week, but we all have, actually. This Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost, which used to be known as Whitsunday. Pentecost comes from the Greek, meaning fifty, as it is 50 days since Easter. Throughout his resurrection appearances, and before, Jesus has been telling his disciples that he will not always be physically present on earth, but that when we resumed his throne in heaven, which we celebrated an Ascension Day, 21 May, he will send down to us a special gift which fulfils his parting promise, 'I am with you always'.

This gift is that of the Holy Spirit, the life-giving and sustaining power of God. Like the air we breathe, it is not easy to describe or visualise, but like the air it is an essential for our spiritual lives. Just as we can primarily discern the presence of air by its effect, so also we primarily discern the Holy Spirit's presence by its effect as well. Initially, the disciples, including Mary, were gathered in fear in a locked room, when the Spirit descended upon them, empowering them to burst forth and start proclaiming the gospel. The Church was born. The Spirit unites humanity with itself and also with God.

- Does the traditional images of the Spirit as a dove, the sound of rushing wind, tongues of fire resonate with you today?
- Have you experienced a 'pentecostal' experience – would you want one?!
- Can you see the Holy Spirit's activity in yourself?
- How do you discern the Spirit at work in others?
- Is it a universal gift, or just reserved for a favoured few?

The term 'born-again Christian' is today a somewhat nuanced one, and does not necessarily describe a Christianity with which we are necessarily comfortable or even attractive. Although this expression has been hijacked by some as the sole identifying feature of being 'saved', actually all who have been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, have been 'born again'. It means that our souls have been enlivened, as we live our lives not just as children of earthly parents and a human family, but also as children of a heavenly Father, and members of the family of Christ, brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Many, perhaps, most, of us have positive images of 'family', and even if our own background does not permit us fully to enter into the analogy, nevertheless as an ideal it helps us to understand what it means to belong to one another. It doesn't take much imagination, or memory, to consider the variety of family: generations, gender, likenesses, tastes, talents, outlooks and opinions. Usually we manage to live with them all! It shows how important and powerful relationships can be. The Holy Spirit is our 'common' connection, like the bloodline which unites and identifies. It makes into family.

- What is your experience of family?
- How different are members of your family?
- Are there some to whom you are more drawn than others, but does that make them any less 'family'?
- Do you have family 'get-togethers' – and do you see Church in the same way?
- What keeps you together?

At Pentecost, we become one, united with each other and God. We are given a sense of identity and purpose. We are given the means to live together in peace, even with those whom we fundamentally disagree. We become the Body of Christ.