

This morning we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, that is God's sending of the Holy Spirit to the world. Therefore it is appropriate for us to consider the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. I take the cue from the Apostle Paul in his excellent exposition on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

St. Paul says, *'If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.'* St. Paul can draw some uttermost implication in the case of Christ not having been raised from the dead. This morning let us also draw some serious implication if the Holy Spirit has not been sent to us by God through Jesus Christ.

The reason why I want to use the resurrection as an analogy is because both the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has at least one thing in common, that is that both cannot be seen visibly through our human eyes. It's got to be seen and experienced through faith. People without faith will never have any understanding of both. So we must ask ourselves what would happen if the Holy Spirit had not been sent to world.

First, the Christian Church would have had died away as soon as Jesus ascended into heaven if the Holy Spirit had not been sent to us. Some people would say Pentecost is the date of birth of the Christian Church. Personally I believe the church had been born once Jesus called the twelve disciples. The Christian movement was indeed a divine initiative through the coming of Jesus Christ, and by his words and deeds the church came into being. In this sense the Christian movement is no different from other religious movement. However, there is a great difference, usually a religious movement has its climatic height in the founder's life time and then fades away within one or two generation afterwards. But in the case of Jesus' movement, he only had a handful of people with him just before he ascended to heaven. One would assume the movement would pass away very quickly. None of his disciples has any of the inspiring and commanding qualities of Jesus had possessed. They were according to the book of Acts, 'idiot agrammartoi', i.e. simple folks. No one could have bet on them to succeed in keeping the movement alive, let alone to prosper it.

Of course the disciples had seen the resurrection of Jesus with their own eyes. They were no longer disillusioned and in despair. That is for sure. However, as we read in John's gospel, in the incident of Jesus' appearing to them again in the presence of Thomas they were still in fear of the Jews. They

knew that Jesus actually rose from the dead but they still could not proclaim it publicly without fear. They were in fact still hugging together in fear of losing their lives like their master. So what caused them to change so dramatically, to go out and proclaim with such boldness and cheerfulness? Today's first reading tells us it was simply through the coming and equipping of the Holy Spirit, the apostles launched the movement in renewed and vigorous strength and enthusiasm. When I was studying in England in the latter half of last century, some critics of Christianity kept saying that the Christian church would not survive the second millennium. It may be a fact that only a minority of numbers attend church in the West but the church still is very much alive all over the world. We constantly hear the encouraging news that the church grows in enormous speed in some developing countries. Every day in Africa, South America and Asia, churches are formed. Thousands and thousands of people get baptized daily. In the coming of the Holy Spirit we read, one of the signs accompany the Holy Spirit was that the disciples could speak in tongues. We may not see the Holy Spirit with eyes but we certainly still see its manifesting sign. All over the world, churches of different languages and tongues worship today. Jesus' parable of the Kingdom of God like a mustard seed has come true.

Second, if the Holy Spirit had not come to the world, the church would not have known how to address to the world. Once Jesus was baptized in river Jordan He knew that God has already set an agenda for him. That agenda was for him to call Israel back to the vocation to be a blessing to the world and the light to all nations. Once he realized his nation had not taken heed of his good news and repented, he knew that the only way to fulfill his nation's vocation was to die on her behalf, that was the only way to defeat Satan, the ruler of this world.

But there is a vast difference between first century and the third decade of the third millennium. Jesus' agenda for the world may only be applicable to the first century but not for us. The church may feel lost in a virtual reality world. Does the church still have a relevant message to the world? Listen to Jesus words in John's gospel reading, *'Receive the Holy Spirit'*. What for? Before he died he had told them, *'I will send the Holy Spirit to you. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.'* We must recognize the vast difference between the first century and our time, but the church has already been given an agenda by the Holy Spirit to address to the world. Despite the vast difference between the first century and the third millennium, humankind has not changed a bit. We are still the same species.

War still going on in every generation and all over the world. In fact sins become more subtle now than the first century. We are told, during the pandemic, cyber-crimes increased enormously. Idolatry and paganism are still prevalent in society nowadays as much as in the first century. Post-modern people are still spiritually hungry and trying hard to find way to God as much as first century Jews were. The New Age movement in the religious sense not much different from the Dead Sea Scroll Community. Both want to find a way to God through an alternative route.

We may not use the same language as Jesus used but the church in the third millennium still has the same agenda given by the Holy Spirit. We have to convince everyone the sin of the world, and of every individual. We proclaim to the world the righteousness; that is our relationship with God has been established through the death of Jesus Christ. We implore the world to believe in the Gospel and be reconciled to God the Father.

Last but not least, if the Holy Spirit had not been sent to the world, the church would not have been reformed continuously. One of the great dangers facing the church of every generation is to become complacent and self-justified. Once it comes to that stage, corruption will then creep in and the church will lose her purpose on earth; that is to witness for Christ. The seven churches in Asia Minor spoken of in the Book of Revelation were addressed by the Holy Spirit. They were warned of all sorts of self-justification, self-autonomy and complacency by the Holy Spirit. But thanks be to God, the sender of the Holy Spirit. Not only does the Holy Spirit warn the church but also reforms the church.

I think too much emphasis has been laid on the Reformation in the 16th century as if though that is the defining moment of the Christian church. Clearly God had used people like Luther, Calvin, and others to reform the very corrupt and decadent church of the 16th century. But I believe it is wrong to measure our church life and practice with what the Reformation had done. The Reformation is not a human endeavour but a Holy Spirit movement. I do not mean that the modern church is required of reformation in the same sense as the 16th century church. But the post-modern church must be alert, like the seven churches of Asia Minor, to listen what the Holy Spirit says to us. Whenever the church listens to the Spirit, there is reformation.

I believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to our church at this very moment, more or less like the apostles' time. The apostles were reluctant to bring the

Good News to the Gentile world. As we read in the Book of Acts, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter was led to the first Gentile Cornelius and proclaimed the Good News, it then opened the Gospel door to the Gentile world.

I believe at this very moment, the Holy Spirit is saying to us at Gordon, despite our reluctance we must bring the good news to the non Anglo-Catholic people. If the Anglican Church in Australia still holds the view that we are a people's church and not a sect, then we must listen to what the Holy Spirit says to us: go out and spread the good news among the non-Anglo-Catholic. Take notice of the first sermon Peter and the eleven preached on Pentecost Day. They spoke the languages of the gathering people. They didn't speak Hebrew. The early church consists of Hebrew speaking as well as Greek speaking members. Language did not bind the early Christians together but the Holy Spirit. Our church at Gordon cannot be a mono-linguistic community. If we do not take heed of the Spirit's warning, beware of Jesus saying, 'What you have got will even be taken away from you.'