



The Spirit, the living memory of the church, reminds us that we are born from a gift and that we grow by giving, not by holding on, but by giving of ourselves - Pope Francis

May 19th The Shofar Pentecost

In the Spirit we are One in Christ

In the Epistle reading for Pentecost, Paul highlights one of the great powers on offer to men and women of faith if and when they come together in Christ...*just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)*. So much is on offer for those who *live* Christ. How do we know we are living Christ? If we live Spirit filled lives and truly are the Body of Christ in this place, we would be without the godless divisions that blight communities and parishes that claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Imagine the Church today if this guarantee was taken up and lived as a reality, something visibly animating and empowering the way we live, act and speak. Imagine how the world will look at us if this was what we have to offer our divided communities. Paul in Galatians sets out the signs of what a Spirit led, Christ modelled and God driven faith community would look like...*the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*

Imagine if they could see in us the hope they have for their own families and communities? Paul preached the message of Martin Luther King before the great man himself spoke of his own hopes for a united world. Paul said this Kingdom vision is a reality whenever men and women, led by the Spirit, living in Christ search for the Christ in others before they focus in on the things that annoy them, on the dividing differences. This is the gift we celebrate liturgically at Pentecost.

In the Spirit we are the Body of Christ

The first part of chapter 12 focuses on specific gifts of the Holy Spirit—whether it be miracles or prophecy or healing or the discernment of spirits or the gift of tongues or the interpretation of tongues—these and many more are all given by God for building up the Body of Christ, for building up the Church. The Church's mission in the world truly begins on Pentecost Sunday, a mission and ministry that continues the same mission of Jesus Christ until He returns again in glory.

Paul puts his focus here on the grace of Baptism—the fundamental gift of sanctifying grace, the divine grace drawing a person into the Body of Christ. This is Paul's distinctive image of the Church. It not only says what the Church is, but it also highlights what it does, its mission in the world. The Church *is* the Body of Christ and all Christians are members committing themselves to continuing Christ's mission, a ministry coming directly from God. What He did in the world is now our vocation. What He did. How He did it.

Only in the Spirit can we be disciples of Christ

When Paul speaks here of the grace of Baptism, he does so by highlighting the way God's grace in the sacrament unites us not just to Christ but to one another...so that whether we're Jews or Greeks—Paul says here—slaves or free men (which are two of the major categories in the first century in the Roman Empire), we are all now one in the Body of Christ through the power, the unifying power, of the Holy Spirit. Left on our own, we could never build the kind of loving, caring community for which we were created. Living in the loving harmony God expects is impossible without something beyond ourselves, and that something more is the Spirit, the Spirit poured into us.

For Paul, the Spirit is given *so that Christians can fulfill their mission in the world*. In this way it is a vitalising gift directing the Church in the way God wants her to go. However, it is also a gift we can lock away in our minds and forget about. Acknowledged but not taken up. The Spirit can easily remain little more than a concept, a neat theological idea to be acknowledged but not allowed into our lives for fear it may change us and push us along ways we are not brave enough to venture.

God's life – sanctifying grace

Using traditional theological language, sanctifying grace makes us "pleasing to God." It is the very life of God in our souls...*the very life of God in our souls*. That is a teaching worth savouring! Sanctifying Grace is what God does to us, from within us. It is our share in God's eternal life that is opened to us. It is ours through the life, death, resurrection and Ascension of Jesus and our active participation in it. He is our gateway to life: *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*

(Jn 14:6). Our life is life lived in Christ, a way of living guided and powered by the Spirit. Just as the Father desires.

When the life of God is in our souls, the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are in our souls. While we live in God, it is God who is actively dwelling in us. This is important for our understanding of both ourselves and others. Our hearts become heaven - the house of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit. When we are in the state of grace, our hearts are the Holy of Holies. God-in-us. Again, in case we missed it: our hearts are the Holy of Holies, that sacred space in ancient Israel's Temple where God made his home.

This is where genuine community begins, the reality of the Body of Christ. When we see others in this way God will achieve what we cannot achieve on our own.

God desires to transform us into His image

Every gift and blessing that comes from Him is meant to save us and make us holy, to open wide our hearts to welcome Him home and allow Him to give us eternal life. It is by His indwelling presence, by sanctifying grace in the soul, that we are brought to life again, into the new and everlasting life that we receive through Jesus and His Sacraments; through His presence in His written Word and in the traditions of the Apostles.

It all comes down to grace

Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies (frees us from our sins and makes us right with God) and sanctifies us. But grace also includes all of the gifts the Spirit grants us, enabling us to participate in his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church.

The story of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles is offered to us against the background of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). But what is Babel? It is the description of a kingdom in which men had accumulated so much power, so much knowledge and wealth they thought they no longer needed to rely on a distant God. They foolishly believed they were powerful enough to be able to build a way to heaven by themselves, to open its gates and usurp God's place. They believed they were gods.

But it did not work out like that. While the men are working together to build the tower, they suddenly realize that they were working against each other. While endeavouring to be like God, they risked no longer being human because they had lost a fundamental element of being human: the ability to agree, to understand each other and to work together. They were so focussed on the race to heaven they

lost the ability to live together as a human community on earth. This is the very sin that was initiated by the sin of Adam and Eve, a sin that plagues us still.

This biblical account contains a perennial truth one we forget to our peril; we can see it in history and in our world too. It is the scourge of the Church as well as Christians and their leaders prefer to rule over than serve. The progress of science and technology has enabled us to dominate the forces of nature, to manipulate the elements and to reproduce living beings. In this situation praying to God seems obsolete or pointless, because we can construct and achieve whatever we like.

This is what happens when God is not central in our lives, if we are not defined by the demands and gifts of discipleship. The further we move away from intimacy with God, the less likely we are to be able to tap into the abundance of graces he is pouring into our souls.

It is as if today we are reliving the same experience as Babel. Do we understand each other less and less or are we closer? Are we living together more harmoniously, valuing others as God's children or does suspicion and fear more accurately define human relationships? Is it not true that a sense of mutual mistrust, suspicion and fear seem to be creeping in among human beings even to the point of making one individual dangerous to another? Are we as Christ's Body in the world recognisably different? Are we a part of God's spiritual antidote to the evils that beset our contemporary world? Can unity and harmony really exist or is it but a pipedream? If so, could it be achieved in our own lifetime? Are we the circuit breakers to this malignancy or do we, in our own way, perpetuate and participate in this disease to the detriment of the Kingdom?

Luke records how *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4)*. The fact that the Apostles began to speak in different languages simultaneously emphasizes their unity. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, they were able to transcend the different languages that divided mankind into different races and nations. They lived an alternative to divisions and suspicions and broke down the old tribal hatreds and bitterness that had kept the region at war with each other for centuries. Because they sought to be united, the Holy Spirit blessed their unity and granted them grace to further unite the world through their active preaching and ministry throughout the world.

This is both the gift we offer to our world today and our mission as Christian faith communities.