

John 14. 8-17 (25-27), Acts 2.1-21
Pentecost 15th May 2016
8:00 - 10:00 a.m. St. Andrew's, Totteridge

God in us, and God in one another.

May I speak in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Christians must never forget to be open to the Holy Spirit, who is no more and no less than *God in us, and God in one another*. You sometimes hear the Holy Spirit described as something, a flaming light, someone essentially exterior and absent, who visits us from time to time, usually in very dramatic or melodramatic ways, and then goes away again. But this isn't NT teaching.

In fact the whole teaching of the NT concerning the Spirit is contained in two letters (in the little Greek preposition *en*, meaning *in*). Before the resurrection and ascension, Jesus is always described as being *with* his disciples, *alongside* the people, and so on. But from Pentecost the preposition changes. It is not *with*, but *in, en*. Jesus is in his disciples; his spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, is *in* his people.

The gift of the Holy Spirit means that our deepest reality is a divine reality. The gift of the Holy Spirit is sign, promise, pledge that we *are* the sons and daughters of God, and that God is in us, and that we can overflow, like champagne in a glass, with His life. And the Holy Spirit's gifts to us are many, and various, and some are more showy than others, but all are of equal value in the sight of God. And what a reassurance that is.

I for one am glad that God doesn't reckon any of the gifts superior or inferior to the others, but rather all as necessary to the happy and healthy working of the whole Body of Christ. We look at one another and see each other in all our glorious diversity, but woe betide us if we imagine for one second that any one of us is more important to God or more precious to God than the rest.

As so often, it is the poets who have sensed this the best, even when they had no help or encouragement from the Christian orthodoxy of their time. The 19th century American poet Walt Whitman was being more Christian than he knew when he declared:

*Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and
each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face
in the glass,
I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is
signed by God's name.*

It is because of the Holy Spirit, because of God in us, that we can echo that.

Then, besides filling us with his life, the Holy Spirit fills us with God's love. And that means we will always want to attend to the needs of the individual, however humble he or she may be. Hillaire Belloc was being provocative when he wrote,

*"To love the world for me's no chore;
My trouble is the folk next door."*

This of course is hypocrisy, and the Holy Spirit is a merciless exposé of hypocrisy. Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, the place where God had chosen to build his house and which was dearer to his heart than any place of earth, and wept over its hypocrisies. William Blake was full of the Holy Spirit when he wrote:

*He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars:
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite and flatterer.*

The Holy Spirit challenges us to do good in *Minute Particulars*. Anything less is not of God.

Then, the Holy Spirit reminds us that if God is not only close to us but in us, then we have One to whom we can always speak, provided we are prepared to allow Him to speak in us. As Alfred Lord Tennyson put it long ago:

*Speak to Him ...for He hears
And Spirit with Spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands and feet.*

He is like a shining flame burning within us. And that is exactly what St Augustine discovered when he repeatedly sought God and at last, at last, came to find God in himself. Pentecost is God's gift of himself to us, God in us. As Evelyn Underhill, that great Anglican spiritual writer of the C.20th put it, we have no need of wings to seek God. We have only to place ourselves in solitude, to consider God within us, and not estrange ourselves from so kind a guest.

If we speak, we should try to remember that there is one within to whom we may speak.

If we listen, we should recollect that we have one to listen to, who speaks more nearly. And we need never be separated from such good company

*Speak to Him ...for he hears
And Spirit with Spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands and feet.*

And for that, thanks be to God.

Amen.

John 14. 8-17, 25-27

8 Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, "Show us the Father"?¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.¹¹ **Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;** but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

15 **'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**¹⁶ **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.**¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

25 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you.²⁶ **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.**²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Do not let your hearts be troubled,** and do not let them be afraid.

Acts 2.1-21 The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?'⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters

shall prophesy, and your young men shall
see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸
Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those
days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall
prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven
above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and
smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and
the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great
and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the
name of the Lord shall be saved."

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