

Whitsunday

(This homily is not specific to any of the four sets of lessons, but is intended to be usable with any of them.)

Homily

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come..."

So begins Acts, chapter 2,
read for the Epistle at Mass today.

We know the story,
One hundred twenty of Jesus' followers
were waiting, as He had instructed them,
in an upper room.

There was the sound of a rushing wind,
and the sight of tongues of flame on their heads,
and they began to speak in languages
they had never learned,

They rushed into the street
and began to proclaim the Gospel of Christ,
and thousands accepted Him and His salvation.

We count this as the beginning
of the Church here on the earth.

It was the coming of the Holy Spirit,
the filling of the infant Church,
and of its individual believers

with a filling that had never been before.

There were 120 believers
packed into that small upper room,
waiting, praying,

not knowing what would come next.

They had seen Jesus die.

They knew He had risen again.

They had spoken with Him,

walked with Him,

and been instructed by Him.

They had seen Him taken up into heaven,

and had heard His parting instruction

that they would be witnesses,

teaching all nations.

But they waited,

yes, partly out of obedience --

He had told them to wait --

but, probably, also out of fear

and out of weakness.

Where had they been during the 40 days

after His resurrection?

Hiding, for the most part,

keeping a low profile,

avoiding the authorities that had killed Him.

Now they knew their mission,

and that mission was to confront the world,

to speak truth the authorities,

whether the Jewish religious authorities,

or the Roman government,
 did not want to hear,
 and desired, in fact, to forbid its teaching.

Could they do the job?

Are you kidding?

They were weak and fearful,
 and not at all well-educated.

They had their instructions,
 but it doesn't seem that they could have
 had any idea of how they might do it.

Left to the ability of men,
 the Church would have died then and there.

But that was not God's plan.

Just as God the Son had become man
 in order to be both Sacrifice and Teacher,
 so God the Spirit,

the Third Person of the Trinity,
 came down upon the Church,
 and turned a gathering of frightened men
 into an embodiment of the power of God.

There certainly was visible expression
 of His coming:

A sound of rushing wind,
 the sight of flames upon each of them,
 the startling sound of God's praises
 in every language they could imagine,
 but above and beyond it all,

an amazing boldness as simple men,
 chiefly one Galilean fisherman
 named Peter
 spoke in the public square
 and brought conviction to many hearts.

We speak much of the gifts of the Spirit.
 In the Sacrament of Confirmation,
 we declare that, by the laying on of hands,
 the Holy Ghost is conferred upon the recipient..
 But we seem oblivious to the full meaning
 of this amazing gift.

It is not a gift of abilities or powers
 or some kind of vague spiritual character,
 but a real encounter with the real and living God.
 He (not "it", but "He") enters into and fills a life,
 and not merely an individual life,
 but the life of the Church itself,
 of which that individual is part.

At Confirmation, and over and over again
 as we walk with Christ,

He fills us, an encounter with God.

If we recognize and accept His presence,
 something changes,

Will we allow that in our own lives?

Let us pray.

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

Whitsunday

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Wisdom 1:1-7

Second Lesson: John 4:19-26

Homily

Jesus, quoted by St. John

God is a Spirit:

and they that worship him

must worship him in spirit and in truth.

The Book of Wisdom

For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world:

and that which containeth all things

hath knowledge of the voice.

from the Epistle

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come...”

There’s something a bit difficult to grasp about this Feast of Pentecost.

It is often called the third most important of all Christian celebrations, after Easter and Christmas, and so it is.

But there’s a sort of unreality, a definite lack of focus,

You see,

we can relate to the birth of a child,

and there’s something immediate

about the death of a man

and the surprising twist of a resurrection.

We know Jesus to be far more than a man,

but we also know that he is one,

quite thoroughly so,

and it is easy to relate to him as one.

All the emotions that surrounded those events

are entirely familiar to us,

and so it should be

But what can we say of this day?

How do we relate to these events?

We sometimes speak of the birthday of the Church,

and there is indeed a sense in which it’s true,

but that tends to feel like a celebration

of the nuts and bolts of a religious machine.

It’s a little hard to get our minds around it,

especially when we take note of the mess

that men so often make of this church.

Perhaps it’s because we really don’t grasp

the reality of what the Church really is.

We think of buildings,

of rules and systems,

of carefully orchestrated occasions of worship,

of a sense of place and community,

of stability and permanence,

and we like to have it all under control.
And, we're Anglicans, we like dignity
and order and propriety, don't we?

So what do we make of an indoor windstorm,
of people that look like they're burning up,
of the sound of a hundred languages,
gabbling, as it would seem, all at once,
or, the really intimidating thought
of a roomful of excited zealots
bursting excitedly into a busy street?

And what do we make of
the confrontational nature of the message
being proclaimed that day?
Peter looked his audience in the eye,
and boldly proclaimed, "You killed Him!"

And how do we account
for the sudden accession of thousands
of new converts in one single day?

The answer is both simple and mysterious.
"The answer", as the song of the sixties had it,
"is blowing in the wind",
the wind of the Holy Spirit,
as Jesus is quoted by St. John to say,
"The wind bloweth where it listeth."

The New Testament Greek word
"Pneuma".....(*p'NOO-ma*)
and the Old Testament Hebrew word
"Ruach".....(*roo-ACK*)
are surprisingly alike
in that both of them have a double meaning:
one is "wind or breath", and the other is "spirit".

On the day of Pentecost
there was a mighty revelation
of the Holy Spirit of God,
utterly mysterious,
utterly incomprehensible,
and yet closer to us than our own breath.
He is called, in terms we can't quite grasp,
the third Person of the Holy Trinity.
He is God, yet neither Father nor Son.
Inseparable from them,
unknowable apart from them,
and yet distinct.
He is both Person and power,
a distinction attempted, somewhat inconsistently,
in both Prayer Book and King James Bible,
by the use of two distinct English titles:
Holy Ghost which usually points to Him as person,
and Holy Spirit, usually speaking of His power.

He is entirely invisible and unknowable,

but He is known and present and active
by what He does.

On the day of Pentecost,
He moved upon the infant Church,
made His presence known in each one of them,
and worked through them to reveal God,
the awesomeness of the Father,
and the love of Jesus His Son,
and to transform a world.

This would be an exciting story,
even if it were only something from days gone by,
but it is more than that, far more.
It was the beginning of a new day,
of a new world,
the launching of a new thing,
of one holy catholic and apostolic Church,
a body of men, women, and children set aside
to be the temple of the Living God,
to be His voice, His feet, and His hands
in the midst of a fallen world

As St. Paul said,
“Ye are the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus, quoted by St. John
God is a Spirit:

*and they that worship him
must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Try another translation there:
It would be just as easy to read the Greek this way:
*“...and they that worship him
must worship him in breath and in truth.”*

It's not some strange mystical experience
being talked about here
(though such experiences do happen),
but something far more everyday and routine.
We are called upon to worship God with our breath,
in other words to worship him by being His,
as we walk, as we work, as we speak,
in our doing and our planning and our resting,
and in our loving.
We've been marked for this purpose and no other,
by the washing of water in the name of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
and by the awesome seal of Confirmation.
The Holy Spirit has come upon us and is in us,
and our commission,
as given on the Mount of Olives,
at the Ascension of our Lord,
and as confirmed and empowered
on that day of Pentecost,
is to be God's agents in fulfilling

what we heard in the Book of Wisdom:

*“...the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world:
and that which containeth all things
hath knowledge of the voice.*

That’s what we’re for.
That’s what we can do.
Are we?

Let us pray:

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 our 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.
Amen.

Whitsunday

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Joel 2:28-32

Second Lesson: Rom 8:1-11

Homily to be written

Whitsunday

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Wisdom 7:22-8:1

Second Lesson: Eph 1

Homily to be written

Whitsunday

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Is 11:1-9

Second Lesson: John 6:53-69

Homily to be written