

- Reflections for a Time of Pandemic –  
Pentecost Sunday

\* ‘Am I struggling right now without the Holy Spirit?’ \*

In these uncertain times, people are affected in many ways. Currently, there are programmes such as Jobseeker and Jobkeeper which are helping those who otherwise would face failed businesses and unemployment. Unfortunately, there are many who cannot benefit from such programmes.

Social life is beginning to return but many are facing all kinds of questions about themselves, their lives and their futures. We are all wondering about what life will be like as we pass through this time. We are in an economic recession but staring down the barrel of a full blown depression.

***The Paraclete helps in challenging times***

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost, the One Jesus described during the Last Supper as ‘the Paraclete’. <sup>1</sup> No English word captures the full meaning of *Paracletos*, for it varies according to the context in which it is used.

The only way to get the sense of Paraclete is to seek the various experiences of the Holy Spirit to which it refers. We do this by praying to the Risen Jesus or to the Holy Spirit in different life situations.

***Experience of the Paraclete***

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, always helps those who seek help in difficult times.

If, in our prayer, we share our sadness, grief or depression, we will find the Paraclete *consoling* us.

If we share when we feel confused, lacking in direction or not knowing what we should do, we will find the Paraclete *counselling* us.

If we share doubts about God or matters of faith or are inclined to give up religious practice, we will find the Paraclete *advocating* or *arguing* within on God’s behalf.

If we share temptations to sin, struggles to live some of Christ’s teachings, or that a vice or bad habit hard to break, we will find the Paraclete *protecting* us against the power of Satan.

***Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the community of his followers***

Jesus promised the Apostles that, with God the Father, he would send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, after his Ascension when he returned to God the Father. <sup>2</sup> He told them to

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:16, 26

<sup>2</sup> John 16:26

remain in Jerusalem until he sent the Holy Spirit, as promised, and they had been ‘clothed with power from on high’.<sup>3</sup>

His promise was to them as a community of his disciples, not to them as individuals. They would have experiences of the Holy Spirit as individuals within the community.

And so, at Pentecost, they all received the Holy Spirit together. The Spirit appeared over them as tongues of fire, fire being one of the signs of God in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> The flames were a sign that the Spirit is God.<sup>5</sup>

*The Spirit can change the responsive*

Fire completely changes what is burned – as we see when wood becomes ash in a winter fire. The Holy Spirit can change completely whoever responds to the Spirit’s indwelling.

In the Easter season, we celebrate how Jesus taught that he had come to share his divine life with all who believed in him<sup>6</sup>

**I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.**

He also taught he would share this divine life, and therefore his divine nature, through the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup>

**It is the Spirit that gives life ...**

Sharing in Jesus’ life, through the Spirit, we also share his relationship as the Son of God with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Hence, as St Paul explained<sup>8</sup>

**... we have received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out ‘Abba, Father!’**

Jesus used the image of fire within to express his wish that the Spirit was moving already within people, even before he himself had ascended to heaven, communicating his divine life.<sup>9</sup>

**I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already lit.**

***The Spirit is experienced within***

Jesus taught during the Last Supper that our experiences of the Holy Spirit would come from within and that<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:48

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:3

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 696

<sup>6</sup> John 10:10

<sup>7</sup> John 6:63

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:15

<sup>9</sup> Luke 12:49

<sup>10</sup> John 14:17

**... you (will) know him because he dwells with you, he will be in you.**

Using another scriptural symbol of the Holy Spirit – water – Jesus taught that <sup>11</sup>

**... the water that I shall give will become an inner spring, welling up to eternal life.**

Water is the sign of Baptism when, with the Risen Jesus and God the Father, the Spirit dwells within as temples <sup>12</sup> and communicates to us Jesus sharing his divine life. Water at Baptism is kind of like the amniotic fluid for divine life.

#### *Other experiences of the Spirit Jesus promised*

During the Last Supper, Jesus promised the Apostles that they and we would have other experiences of the Holy Spirit.

In recalling them, we need to remember that he promised these after teaching the need for the Eucharist and to keep his commandments, which proved the baptised person's relationship with him.

Also, the experiences he promised were to them as a community. He promised that

- if we pray for greater understanding of Jesus, his teachings, his actions, and his mission, we will experience the Spirit as the *Spirit of Truth*, guiding our understanding <sup>13</sup>
- if we pray as we struggle against temptations and weaknesses or seek empowerment to live as Jesus taught, the Spirit '*will bear witness*' to Jesus by communicating to us his power of redemption and salvation <sup>14</sup>
- if we pray for deeper understanding than the human reason can grasp or the meaning of Jesus' words and actions, or the meaning and direction of our lives, he Spirit will *lead us to complete truth*. <sup>15</sup>

#### *Empowered to give Christian witness*

Jesus promised before his Ascension that the Spirit would empower his followers – and us today - when we need to give Christian witness <sup>16</sup>

**... you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming on you, and you will be my witnesses ...**

If we are pressured to hide our Christian faith, or are facing persecution, Jesus taught <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John 4:14

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:9

<sup>13</sup> John 14:17

<sup>14</sup> John 15:26

<sup>15</sup> John 16:7

<sup>16</sup> Acts 1:8

**... do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say because when the time comes the Holy Spirit will teach you what to say.**

In the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy, Paul who was in prison for the faith reminded Timothy <sup>18</sup>

**... God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of Power and love and self control.**

***The need to discern inner movements by the Holy Spirit***

As we recall Jesus' promise, we need to be realistic too about the fact that there are other influences within us as well as movements by the Spirit.

There are strong emotions at times, fixed attitudes, life hurts and many other feelings. This is why we are warned in the First Letter of John <sup>19</sup>

**My dear friends, do not trust every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.**

We discern inner movement by the Holy Spirit from other inner movements by testing them against what we call the Fruits of the Holy Spirit <sup>20</sup>

**... love, joy, peace  
patience, kindness, goodness  
faith, gentleness, self control.**

*Love* here refers to the Christ-like self sacrificing love Jesus commanded at the Last Supper, <sup>21</sup> the love which St Paul describes as <sup>22</sup>

**is patient ... is kind ... is not jealous ... is not boastful ... or rude; (a love which) does not take offence ... plan evil ... (or) rejoice at wrong doing.**

*Joy* is spiritual and so deeply heart felt, not just emotional. As a fruit of the Spirit, joy gradually grows within. It does not come and go like happiness.

*Peace* is spiritual and the experience of inner harmony which reflects oneness with God, even when at the emotional level we may be afraid or nervous.

*Patience* is the inner strengthening by the Holy Spirit to endure even periods of suffering, as Christ did.

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 12:11-12

<sup>18</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7

<sup>19</sup> 1 John 4:1

<sup>20</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>21</sup> John 15:12-13

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 13

*Kindness* is Christ-like sensitivity.

*Goodness* is behaviour which reflects God, as did the behaviour of Jesus.

*Faith* is trust in God, as Jesus trusted God the Father.

*Gentleness* is Christ-like self mastery and tenderness through the power of the kingdom.

Any inner movement which conflicts with any of these Fruits will be caused by some other inner influence – but not by the Holy Spirit. St Paul gives examples. They include tendencies to <sup>23</sup>

... rivalry, jealousy, bad temper, ... malice ...

*The 'angel of light'*

St Paul warns of temptations by Satan who 'disguises himself as an angel of light'. <sup>24</sup> In practical terms, St Paul is warning that

**Satan tempts good people to do good other than God's will.**

A characteristic of God's will is inner harmony or peace about some good – but also *about how* the good should be achieved. Sometimes what people want to do is good but the way they go about it alienates or hurts or 'turns others off'. In such situations, it can be that they succumbed to the angel of the light.

Temptations by the angel of light commonly are experienced as an inner nagging or pressure to do what we think to be a good or just thing. There is strong emotion which disrupts inner harmony, a kind of intense insistence.

### ***Community gifts of the Spirit***

As well as gifts for our personal lives, the Spirit gives gifts for the lives of Christian communities, such as parishes.

The Spirit descending on the Apostles as a body mirrored the Spirit descending on Jesus at his Baptism. <sup>25</sup> Filled with the Holy Spirit who filled Jesus, <sup>26</sup> the Apostles became the Body of Christ in the world. <sup>27</sup> Christians have become members of this Body ever since.

The Spirit moves responsive and mature Christian communities to continue the mission of Jesus to the world. They are moved to continue to care for the sick, provide for those in need, teach the Gospel and mirror the other activities of Jesus.

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 5:

<sup>24</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:14

<sup>25</sup> Luke 3:22

<sup>26</sup> Luke 4:1

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18

For this mission, different members receive different gifts, as we heard in the second reading of this Mass. Through the Spirit, they can draw on what Christ offers through the sacraments. In today's Gospel, we heard Jesus sharing the Spirit and so the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

### *Parish discernment*

In every parish, there are laity who share the gifts of the Spirit needed for their distinctive mission to the world.<sup>28</sup> Then there is the priest with his particular gifts of the Spirit so that he can build up and form the laity for their mission to the world.

The gifts of laity and priests are *both* needed for a parish to flourish.

If those of the priest dominate, the parish will not be a mission-orientated faith community to the world.

On the other hand, if the gifts of laity dominate, the parish community will weaken, and even divide.

The parish discernment structure, therefore, is its Parish Pastoral Council. This is the meeting point of priestly and lay gifts of the Spirit.

As both these come together, the direction of Christ through the Spirit for the parish becomes clear. But only to the extent that the gifts the Spirit gives to priests and lay members are all recognised, respected and listened to.

### *Conversation with Christ*

Let us pause now to thank the Risen Jesus for sharing with us the Holy Spirit.

And as we recall the many ways the Spirit can keep us, let us ask ourselves

**Am I struggling with any life challenges or questions right now without seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete?**

**Bishop Gerard Holohan**

29 May 2020

Below is the link to the Mass to be livestreamed on Sunday at 9am

<https://youtu.be/IXDLaOEqobQ>

And the link of the recording available directly after Mass

<https://www.facebook.com/BunburyParish/>

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<sup>28</sup> Vatican II: Decree on the Lay Apostolate 2