

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

5th June 2022 - Pentecost Sunday

Readings (Year C): 1st: Acts 2:1-11. Psalm: 103. 2nd: Romans 8:8-17. Gospel: John 14:15-16. 23-26.

Most years the images of wind and fire, such strong powerful images I have developed on Pentecost Sunday. It is right always to have them in mind as we think of the Holy Spirit.

The immediate impact on the apostles was radical and dramatic: Previously they were locked behind closed doors, fearful and unsure of what to do. Now they emerge in broad daylight, full of courage, charged with conviction, with a clear sense of their mission.

In the gospel today however Jesus uses another word with reference to the Holy Spirit. In our translation it is Advocate, which is the Latin translation of the Greek word Paraclete. This means someone called it for support: to come to one's aid; one who speaks in favour of another; a helper; a counsellor or a protector.

The Douai version, with Bishop Challoner's notes gives Paraclete, but in a foot note adds 'that is a comforter, and *for ever*: hence it is evident that this Spirit of truth was not only promised to the persons of the apostles, but also to their successors through all generations.'

Comforter can be understood as strengthener (*comfortis*) rather than consoler: the suggestion is of one who makes us brave and strong by being brave and strong beside us.

To strengthen is the best of all ways to comfort, for it brings a bracing consolation, and not a relaxing sympathy (which is why I always prefer the famous Advent reading from Isaiah 40 as Comfort, comfort my people: i.e. strengthen them, for the Lord is coming to his people)

The promise of Jesus is that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, would give immense inner strength to all who believe. The word is used five times in St John's writings, and always in reference to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It is a legal term for an attorney or spokesman who defends the cause of the accused in a courtroom.

The Advocate is the consoler who lifts the minds of the apostles from depressing circumstances to the memory of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus uses it for a heavenly intercessor who is called to the side of God's children to offer strength and support.

Jesus is a Paraclete because in heaven he pleads to the Father for believers still struggling on earth.

The Spirit too is a Paraclete because he is sent to strengthen the disciples in Jesus' absence; instructs them in the truth and defends them against the prosecutions of the devil, who is the 'accuser' of the family of God. The Spirit works through the sacraments to renew the world with the graces and blessings that Christ died to give us.

Hence the great moment in every Mass, when the 1st hand bell rings at the consecration, when the rubrics in the missal say: *'the priest joins his hands and holding them extended over the offerings, says Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration'*

The light of faith, the strength to hope and the ability to love as Christ did –these are beyond our natural powers. Faith, hope and love are given when the Holy Spirit is at home in the soul. The Holy Spirit is God's love ever beside us, the divine friend who whispers comfort to the heart and light to the mind.

The eternal truth of the word of God is the source of unflinching strength in the face of all contradiction. ***Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.***

Send forth your Spirit O Lord and renew the face of the earth.