

Notes on the readings for Pentecost – Whitsunday.

The gift of the Holy Spirit sees the birth of the Church as the Apostles go out to preach the gospel.

For the Old Testament: Acts 2: 1-21

Jesus told his disciples that unless he left then the Spirit of Truth would not be given them. This reading sets out the fullest account of that event, as the disciples waited expectantly for the coming of the Spirit, but not knowing exactly what that would mean. When they receive the Spirit, there is a realisation that this is in fulfilment of the Joel's prophecy that God will pour out his Spirit on all humanity, the promise of salvation for all who call on the Lord. The twofold gift of the Spirit as fire, and wind represent the power of God poured out on the disciples. We see the result as they tumble out of the building to share the good news with all who would hear, to the surprise of the crowds, who thought they were drunk. And yet the message of the gospel is universal as the list of the nations represented shows. Somehow, all were able to understand the message, the Spirit equipping the Church in its task of telling of God's love in Christ. There is truth here for us today that if we call upon God, he will equip us for the task – but we have to get on our knees and wait expectantly.

Epistle: Romans 8: 22-27

We live in the in-between times – between the Resurrection of Jesus and his coming again. Until that moment of fulfilment, the whole creation is groaning in labour pains v22. And God has given us the Spirit to help us through this time, and to guide us in living the Christian life. It is the Spirit which helps keep hope alive and spurs us on to faithful living. The Spirit is able to take our faltering prayers and present them before the Father, which must surely be a great encouragement to us all. Pentecost is a time of hope and promise; may we be enthused, as were the disciples, to live more truly as the people of God.

Gospel: John 15: 26; 16: 4b-15

In calling the Holy Spirit the 'Paraclete' v26, Jesus is underlining the way in which the Spirit comes alongside us and supports us, especially at moments of crisis. So much of our hope is set in the future, yet we are called to live in the present, imperfect as we are, to declare the truth of God – a truth which the Spirit will reveal to us as is necessary for the moment. The particular truth that the Spirit reveals is to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement v 8-11. The meaning of these three is found in the person of Jesus: the greatest sin is not to believe in Jesus; who was condemned as a criminal, and yet was raised to God's right hand; and the judgement of the cross is that evil is defeated by love. The Church knows this to be true, but the world does not. Pentecost is a call to mission by the Church to take out the gospel as those Apostles did that first Whitsunday. We need to pray for boldness and courage to do so.