

6th Sunday of Easter Year A

As we move towards the great feast of Pentecost during this later stage of Easter season, the Church focuses more on the Holy Spirit and the action of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the Church. Sometimes the Western church is criticised for overlooking the person, the role, and the action of the Holy Spirit, compared to the Eastern Church.

The Eastern Church does have a more balanced approach when it comes to Pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit and Christology – study of Christ). There are three ages in the life of the world – theologically speaking – the age of the Father – this is the Old Testament times where God the Father spoke through various prophets to reveal his will and plan for the chosen people of God. Then with the coming of the Messiah – we have the age of the Son – where God speaks definitively through his Son – then with the ascension of Jesus and his promise of the Holy Spirit the world enters the age of the Spirit – starting from the day of Pentecost. So we are in the age of the Spirit, now it is the Spirit of God that reveals who God

is in and through Jesus. As the scriptures say “no one can even say Jesus is Lord, unless he is influenced by the Holy Spirit” – We are called to be the people of the Spirit of God – the question is how?

Firstly by having a hope that will never pass away... In the first letter of Peter we hear “Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have, but give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience...”

True Christian Hope can be puzzling for the secular world – here is a short story

The scene is the courtyard of a prison. The time is dawn. A prisoner is led out to be shot: he is a priest who has been sentenced to death because he has opposed the Portuguese policy of slave-trade in the country's colony. He stands against an outer wall facing seven members of the firing-squad, all of them his own countrymen. Before the officer ties the blindfold he asks the prisoner for the traditional last request. The reply comes as a surprise: the man about to die wants to play his flute for the last time.

The firing -squad is stood at ease as they wait for the prisoner to play. When he does, the prison compound is filled with music that sounds all the more beautiful in this strange place. The officer is worried because the more the music plays, the more absurd his task appears to be. He orders the prisoner to stop playing, ties the blindfold, and gives his soldiers the command to fire. The priest dies instantly. But the music lingers on to puzzle his executioners: in the face of certain death, where does the music come from?

Christian hope does not disappoint us no matter how dire the human situation looks like. In our gospel for today we heard Jesus saying “If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, **TO BE WITH YOU FOR EVER**, that Spirit of truth, whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him, but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.

Have we encountered the Spirit of God in a tangible life changing way?

A Christian who has true hope is someone who has received the power of the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit sacramentally

when we are baptised and confirmed. However, receiving the Holy Spirit is neither an event in the past nor a once-off event. **Once we are confirmed we are not done!** We do not automatically become full of the Holy Spirit. Even if we are ordained a priest, or a bishop or elected as a Pope, **we will never be full of the Holy Spirit! There is always more to receive, there is always more to grow and encounter when it comes to the Spirit of God. God is infinite. We can't exhaust receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Therefore, to have a deep hope we need to hunger more for the Holy Spirit of God and be open to receive and grow in the gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

In our times, faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel, the problem is at this time of history God is disappearing from the human heart, and with the dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings with increasingly evident destructive effects. The absence of god in contemporary society leaves a deep inner void, which people seek to fill with all kinds of spiritual counterfeits. There is a growing culture of narcissism, in which the highest values are placed on self-

fulfilment, physical attractiveness, pleasure and the accumulation of possessions. This has contributed to the breakdown of the family and fuels what John Paul the II call a culture of death.

This is why Jesus says in today's Gospel : In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you, he is speaking about the indwelling of the Spirit in the heart of the believer! This is the fulfilment of the Good news, once Jesus was raised from the dead and taken to heaven in his ascension, he promises the Holy Spirit to be our constant companion/counsellor/advocate living within us. This is the undoing of the alienation our first parents experienced with their disobedience in the garden of Eden. This is the answer for the – Existential Loneliness! – we can all experience a deep loneliness no matter what our state of life is- single, married, separated, widowed ect... we are made to be in communion with God... Holy Spirit is given to us to take away that existential loneliness... created by sin and disobedience.

How do we know we are growing in the Holy Spirit? In this indwelling of God within us in the Spirit? If we are growing in the

fruits of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5) and other gifts of the Spirit, we can be certain we are growing in the Holy Spirit. So, a hopeful believer is someone who continues to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and grow in these fruits and gifts and become more Christlike in their thoughts, actions, and the way of life.

The hope of the disciples is something the world can see, but cannot account for. The disciples can account for their hope by pointing to the power of God's spirit which funds them. They know that the power is not their own. Without the holy spirit, there would be no music to puzzle the firing-squad. What music are you playing currently in front of your own 'firing squads' – whatever they may be Because the Holy Spirit will always give us a tune to sing to, a melody to play, and a beat to dance... whatever the situation or season in our lives.