

The Fourth Sunday of Easter – 3rd May 2020 – Acts of the Apostles 2 v 14,36-41

As we continue to pray for a New Pentecost in the life of the Church, our first reading today, following on from the account of St.Peter's first sermon (2 v 22-33) last Sunday – the first "papal homily" in the history of the Church – records for us the reaction, the response, to St.Peter's preaching on that first Pentecost Sunday. His hearers are "cut to the heart" (v37). It reminds us of that verse from the Letter to the Hebrews with which we began this Year of God's Word, the Year of the God Who Speaks (on Monday 30th September, the Feast of St.Jerome) – " The Word of God is living and active , sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4 v 12).

It is clear that the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work on that first Day of Pentecost. It was the Holy Spirit, and not the Apostles, Who spoke (with Divine authority) through their merely human utterances (2 v 4). The Holy Spirit wields the Word of God like a sword (Ephesians 6 v 17), and unless the Holy Spirit "takes up" and applies the Word of God to our hearts, that Word cannot penetrate us and transform us. If we are to be revived as a Church, it can only be a Work of the Holy Spirit (responding to our earnest prayers – and novenas), cutting us to the heart, convicting our consciences, turning our wills and warming our hearts. Otherwise, our speaking and preaching is no more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13 v 1).

In this Year of the God Who Speaks, we pray that the Holy Spirit will " *heal our wounds, our strength renew, On our dryness pour Thy dew, Wash the stains of guilt away. Bend the stubborn heart and will, Melt the frozen, warm the chill, Guide the steps that go astray*". This is the Work, the Ministry, the Divine Vocation of the Holy Spirit, so let us address our prayers (and our pleas) to Him. The Work of Christ is finished, "it is accomplished" (St.John 19 v 30), now we must pray (earnestly) that the Holy Spirit (in this Age - or Dispensation - of the Holy Spirit) will apply powerfully to our souls all the merits and graces purchased for us by the Blood of Jesus. That Sacrifice Jesus offered once for all upon the Cross (Hebrews 9 v 27 & 28;10 v 12 & 14) and now, in and through the Holy Spirit, " He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7 v 25). We draw near to Jesus through the Holy Spirit, Whom the Risen, Ascended and Glorified Jesus, seated at the Right Hand of the Father, sent down from heaven on the Day of Pentecost.

In the long history of the Church, there have been great outpourings of the Holy Spirit. We read even in the Book of Acts, that after His first coming down on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, again and again, came down in power upon the early church. There have been great times of renewal and refreshment through the centuries – the "Golden Age" of the Saints in Wales in the fifth and sixth centuries, the great flourishing of monasticism and the renewal of culture in the thirteenth century, the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century, the revivals of religion within Protestantism in the eighteenth century, Orthodox Russia in the nineteenth century.

What will be the sign that the Holy Spirit is working more deeply in our hearts and moving us towards a New Pentecost? It will be when the words of William Cowper become our daily prayer - "*O for a closer walk with God! Return, O Holy Dove, return, Sweet Messenger of rest, I hate the sins that made Thee mourn, And drove Thee from my breast*". It will be when we cry out in anguish of spirit, "**what must I do?**" (2 v 37), and begin to access and appropriate all the means of grace that God has given to us (through Word and Sacrament) with thanksgiving and generosity. It will be when I dare not think that God's people are worshipping together, that Holy Mass is being celebrated (even on week days!) and divine graces and blessings offered in abundance, and that I shall be absent.

Prayer of Pope St.John XXIII, " Renew Your wonders in our day, as by a New Pentecost. Grant to Your Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, she may advance the reign of our Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Come Holy Spirit, in Your power and might to renew the face of the earth".