

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – 17th May 2020 - The Gospel of John 14 v 15 – 21

In our Gospel today, Jesus (on the night of the Last Supper) promises the Gift of the Holy Spirit to His Disciples. "I shall ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth". Although the Holy Spirit had been at work in Creation (Gen.1 v 2), and worked powerfully in the life of Israel under the Old Covenant (of Moses) – (1Sam. 10 v 10-13; Num.11 v 17; 2Kings 2 v 9; Ps.139 v 7) –nevertheless (in a way, and a manner, that we do not understand) the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven upon the Church (on the Day of Pentecost) in a new dispensation of the Holy Spirit which depended upon, and directly resulted from, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, so that Jesus said to His Disciples, "it is to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16 v 7).

Again in a way that stretches our understanding, Jesus did not enter into heaven when He died but descended into Sheol - the realm of the departed - and "preached to the spirits in prison" (1Peter3 v 1). Neither did He enter heaven on the day of His Resurrection, but for forty days remained "earth-bound" (in a way we do not understand) continuing His *earthly* Ministry of teaching the disciples and preaching the Good News (Luke 24 v 13 – 35; John 21 v 4-23).

There can be no doubt that the disciples and followers of Jesus thought that the End of the World had come upon them for, indeed, the End of the World had come upon them. Death was destroyed and overthrown! The end of death! The End had come! The Kingdom of God, to which the earlier generations of the prophets and the people of God had so earnestly looked forward, had indeed broken into the world in and through the Person and the Ministry of Jesus (Luke 10 v 23/24; 11 v 20) and yet, after forty days, Jesus was taken up from them into heaven. This Thursday (21 May) we shall celebrate the Glorious Ascension of Christ into heaven. He Who descended from heaven in the Womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary now returns to heaven, to pour out the Gift of the Holy Spirit and His gifts of grace upon the Church (Ephesians 4 v 7-10), to unite us and build us up together in Him. Jesus now makes Himself known to us precisely through the Ministry and Person of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is to our advantage (!) that Jesus has ascended into heaven (John 16 v 7) because now, through new birth and the Holy Spirit, He is able to live in the heart of every believer –"I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you" (John 14 v 18), "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become one, even as We are one" (John 17 v 23).

In the Ascension of Jesus, the End of the World has been delayed, and we have been living in the Last Days since that Fortieth Day, and the coming down of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We are living in the Age (or Dispensation) of the Holy Spirit but that Dispensation is going to end with the Return of Jesus ("men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven" Acts 1 v11). There will be "signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud – (as you saw Him go into heaven!) – with power and great glory. Now, when you see these things **begin to take place**, look up and raise your heads, for your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21 v 25-28). When that will be, no one knows (Mark 13 v 32) but these events are pre-ordained and "fixed" (Acts 1 v 7) by God's own authority. Perhaps we are living at the beginning of those days? Who knows? "Take heed, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time will come – lest He come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all. WATCH!" (Mark 13 v 33 & 36).

We live in challenging times. In August 1914 it was widely believed that the war would be over by Christmas. How wrong they were! The casualties and the devastation were far beyond what they could have imagined. Many hope that our present crisis may be over by Christmas. We must wait and see. I think of the words of Gandalf to Frodo - (in *The Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo began to despair of the challenges and the difficulties which threatened to overwhelm them, " I wish none of this had happened") - "so do all who live to see such times, but that's not for them to decide, all we have to decide, is what to do with the time that is given to us".

Let us pray that in the challenges and difficulties which may still lie ahead of us, and relying on the gifts of grace endowed upon the Church by the Ascended and Glorified Jesus, and continuing to pray for the coming down of the Holy Spirit in a New Pentecost, we may dedicate to the Risen Jesus, and consecrate to His Sacred Heart, "**the time that is given to us**" – to Whom be glory now, and unto the Ages of the Ages! Amen.