

27<sup>th</sup> July 2024  
Beverley Festival Sermon  
Acts 2 v 1 – 21  
Romans 8 v 22 – 27  
John 15 26 -27 and 16 4b – 15

## **“We believe in the Holy Spirit”**

*‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.<sup>7</sup> You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.*

May I speak in the Name of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we last gathered in large numbers from across the See of Beverley in this beautiful and holy site it was for my consecration on St Andrew’s Day twenty months ago.

How wonderful and encouraging it is to see so many of you here again today. On that occasion we were directed by the Bishop of Chichester to think about feet – the feet of those who bring good news.

We gather today as a family of Christians, as members of the Body of Christ within the See of Beverley, because of the countless holy men and women whose feet carried the Good News of Jesus across continents and islands through the centuries to us.

And we are given the same responsibility as those who have gone before. Our feet are to take us to people and places who have yet to receive the knowledge of the love of Our Lord.

Our Festival today draws our attention to the Day of Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, because it is the Holy Spirit of God who enables and empowers those feet. It is the Holy Spirit of God who refreshes the tired, dusty, calloused feet. It is the Holy Spirit of God who lightens the load of those feet wearied by the mockers and rejectors of the One whom we know to be the Saviour, whose good news they carry and seek to share.

My brothers and sisters, representatives and friends of the See of Beverley, we are here today because we have heard the words of Jesus and we have responded. We have discovered that in Him (and in Him alone) we find meaning and purpose. Like the individuals and large crowds we read of in the Gospel narratives, who so often pressed in on Him from every side, we cannot get enough of Him.

But, unlike many of those we read of, we are all too often afraid to speak of Jesus and the faith we have in Him. Again, that is not too dissimilar to the post resurrection accounts where we hear of his closest followers keeping themselves hidden away because of fear and uncertainty.

Take heart.

In the Pentecost story we hear of how *all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

In other words, no one did or said anything that was beyond them. And then we see Peter, that timid, confused, impulsive and uncertain one become the sturdy rock that Jesus had promised he would be:

*All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another; 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'*

*But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.'*

The great missionary endeavour of the Church had begun – and there were many feet that carried the Good News to the ends of the earth. And they proclaimed in many languages, including the bittersweet, brutal yet beautiful, language of martyrdom. Each one, men and women, children (yes, children too), teenagers and adults *as the Spirit gave them ability*.

St Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit not only gives us ability, but intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray *with sighs too deep for words*. This is what we hope for when we receive the gift of Confirmation and hear the words of the Bishop said over us: “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Because of the Spirit’s sighs, that are too deep for words, we learn to see the world and all her people as God the Father sees them. We see their splendour and we see their degradation. We recognise our splendour and our degradation. We may groan and we may sigh, but with the Holy Spirit of God within us, we hope for that which we do not yet see.

This is the same hope which St Peter had, the same hope that Our Lord’s Mother had when she said to those who turned to her for help at the Wedding in Cana, “Do what ever he tells you”, when they were given a foretaste of that which was yet to be revealed fully to them; the kingdom of God.

Sometime later, in John’s gospel account, we reach today’s passage where Jesus is preparing the disciples for His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension.

*‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.*

The working out of this begins in earnest, as we have seen, on the Day of Pentecost. That’s when the world at large hears the Apostles’ testimony. But let us not forget the Resurrection appearances given to us a bit further on in John’s Gospel. Remember, the disciples had locked themselves in a room because they were filled with fear when Jesus came and stood among them

*and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

Peace be with you, receive the Holy Spirit, forgive sins appropriately.

Today, in this place, Jesus says the same to us –

Peace be with you: This is not just a greeting. It is a most profound gift, a gift that removes fear.

Receive the Holy Spirit: This is not a gift to be held onto, it is a gift that impels us to “testify, because we have been with him from the beginning”.

Forgive sins, or withhold forgiveness: We know that that we have received the gift of forgiveness and that, with the penitent thief, “today you will be with me in paradise.” But we also know the terrifying responsibility that may ensure that the gift of forgiveness must be withheld.

How do we receive this gift and responsibility today?

Listen carefully to the words said during the Prayer of Consecration – “Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit ... these gifts... [may] be for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Or, in another familiar translation, “Make holy these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them...so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the miracle and mystery of our faith we are in the presence of Jesus and we are fed by Jesus. It is not Jesus, the Son of God, alone who we worship and receive in the Sacrament, but the Holy Spirit too, who has been sent down upon these gifts and inhabits them just as He descended upon and inhabited Jesus at His Baptism in the holy waters of the Jordan.

Today, receive the Holy Spirit in the presence of Jesus. Be strengthened and encouraged. May your feet carry you with joy because together we are going to go out, as faithful catholic Christians within the north of England’s See of Beverley, the jewel in the Church of England, to breathe God’s Peace into people’s lives, to offer them the gift of the Holy Spirit, to challenge and forgive sin. Why?

Because, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Let’s not forget the words of the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of the Church who says – “Do whatever he tells you!”