

Homily for Pentecost (year A) 31st May 2020

Today, St Paul teaches us: *“There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them.”*

Since lock-down began we have, as a society, been reassessing and reflecting on all the jobs and roles that make our society work. There are ‘all sorts of service to be done’. Some service roles we had labelled ‘unskilled’; we now realise how inappropriate that label was. It takes all sorts to make a world, thanks be to God. Today then is about giving thanks for the different gifts and skills that the Holy Spirit has given to different people, all *“for a good purpose”*.

Today also directs us to rejoice in our own gifts. Cast off that mantle of false humility that says “I’m no good”. You are a child of God, Baptised in the name of the Trinity, and Anointed with the Holy Spirit. Gifts have been given to you. Use them to take your place in the one Body of Christ, that is His Church.

Many have been developing and discovering new gifts in response to the needs of this time. Such is the creativity of the Holy Spirit, unlocking depths we were previously unaware of. Much has been made of the ‘spirit’ and unity of these times, heightened by the current concern that this might be draining away, even while it appears we still have a long way to go getting through this. The Holy Spirit is indeed a Spirit of Unity – the presence, power, possibility and action have been glimpsed in this magnified time.

This is also a time of fear. And the Holy Spirit is given to us to deal with our fear. We see this in both the First Reading and the Gospel – they are transformed by the giving of the Holy Spirit, filled with joy, confidence, and courage.

Fortitude (Courage and Endurance) is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Courage is not an absence of fear. Anyone on a mountaineering team who does not fear and respect the mountain is a liability, not an asset. The gift of courage relieves us of unproductive fear, the terror that paralyses the mind and will, so that we can see clearly that which challenges us, and choose, in true freedom and knowledge, how to respond and act.

We are increasingly faced, and likely will be faced, with many prudential judgements that are almost impossible to call. Which is the greater risk, walking round the garden centre or driving on the A24 to get there? Should I get that bump on my leg checked out? How bad does my mental health have to become before it becomes less risky cautiously to go out than stay in? Our need, as individuals, as a society, and as a World, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit is immense, and should be at the forefront of our prayer. Pray too for our bishops, in their negotiations with the government, and the judgement call they are facing regarding the reopening of our churches.

From the first page of the bible “*God’s Spirit hovered over the water*” *Genesis 1:2* to the last page of the bible “*The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’.*” *Revelation 22:17* the Holy Spirit is there, filling creation, giving us life, and raising us to new life, the fulfilment of our ultimate hope: *Give us life with thee on high; Give us joys that never end.*