



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title:
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Acts 2:1-11
Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12:4-13
Gospel John 14:8-17

Pentecost-the end of the Great Fifty days of Easter and a feast that causes unease for many who like their worship to be predictable. For some the word Pentecostal means exuberant worship dancing in the aisles loud music testimonies and unscripted outbursts. We can sometimes get over this problem by saying well these things happened in the old days in the Early Church but that was then and this is now. I do not think that this is right. The Holy Spirit with all the unpredictability is for all Christians all of the time and that includes us here today.

You know one of the things I enjoy about Church is humor. In amongst all the seriousness of Church I have enjoyed the humor of this Church. Frequently I have laughed with people in this congregation. Real humor. The being able to see the funny side of life and to be able laugh at oneself and sometimes at the church. You know sometimes both clergy and lay people can be too serious. We come too church but sometimes we forget why. I am guilty of this. Sometimes I am concentrating so

much on getting it right that I leave no room for God. Everything is so carefully scripted and rehearsed that if the Holy Spirit really did come to inspire me to do something it would be really quite inconvenient and disruptive. Of course there are times when I feel quite unprepared and the intrusion of the Holy Spirit would be most welcome. I won't say what today is.

So who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the breath of God at Creation, the wind moving over the face of the deep as the universe forms from nothing. The Holy Spirit is the courage of prophets. He is anointed wisdom that is given kings. He is the inspiration of Apostles and Gods gift to his people and his Church throughout all the ages. This is the Holy Spirit and as we will say in the Creed in a little while we link this with the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Here we are not just talking about Holy Trinity Makati or indeed the Anglican Communion. It is all of these and more. When we say this we are talking about the sum total of all of Gods people gathered throughout the world.

However when we say these words what is often in many peoples mind is less the vibrant people of God a living temple to his glory and more perhaps a building that is only used for a couple of hours a week. On the one hand we have the Holy Spirit of God unpredictable creative powerful inspiring and on the other hand we may have a nearly obsolete white elephant of a building. However, I hope that your own experience of Church is much better than that but it is probably fair to say that in the

eyes of those who do not attend Church unpredictability creativity and inspiration are not things that the Church is frequently accused of. All of which makes me glad that these two parts of the creed have been put together. They really do belong together and not only because we primarily associate the Holy Spirit with Pentecost which is considered the birthday of the Christian Church but also because if the Church is the Body of Christ on Earth as St Paul says it is then the Holy Spirit who should be that bodies breath of life, its animating spirit.

I was wondering what to say in this sermon. I was idly wondering what would really happen if we opened the doors and let that breath of life in and then took a really deep breath of that life. If we all breathed it in what kind of Church would we have?

The first think I thought of was that we would have a prophetic Church, not a Harry Potter variety but the kind of thing we have in the Old Testament in Isaiah and Amos-the sort of prophecy that brings good news to the oppressed the release of captives and justice for the widow and the orphan. There have been times when the Church has indeed been a powerful voice for justice in the world and there have also been times when we have failed to speak out- times when the Church has not been prophetic enough. Times when the Church has been complicit in some of the worst atrocities that mankind has ever inflicted upon itself. I remember seeing images of the previous Pope visiting the Auschwitz concentration camp to repent of both what was done and what was not done by parts of the Church during the Holocaust. On the other hand the Church can do marvelous works. For Example, Christian Aid Week has encouraged many Churches to speak out against poverty and injustice and to help make Gods world more nearly the place it was meant to be. It has sometimes been said that the Church should not be political. I think it has to be. If the Church is

to be filled with the Holy Spirit with the breath of God then we are absolutely involved with the social and political dimensions of this world. The world that God himself created and for which Jesus gave his life and into which the Spirit came.

The second thing that sprang to my mind was communication. We would be a communicating Church. We have read in the Book of Acts of the First Pentecost. A day when a handful of very ordinary people from Galilee, a backwater, a province were empowered by Gods Spirit and spoke in many languages so that everyone who heard them would understand what God had done and what God still wanted to give them. I wonder what the Church would be like if we could express what we believe in a way that people could understand, that they could relate to no matter whatever their background, in a society where so many people have never really heard what God is all about and what he wants to do for each individual. What would it mean for the Church really to speak to communicate and to be heard? That would of course mean something very different in each different context. It could mean something different here in Holy Trinity Manila than in a parish in Uganda London New York or Tondo. Part of our task is to learn to speak with the Spirit flowing through us so that those who are around us can actually hear what God wants us to say. What would it mean for the ordinary people of the Church? For Gods ordinary people to stand up and witness to his power and love and what would it mean for that communication to be something that was not embarrassing or awkward, for it not to be something that we cross the street to avoid and we have all done that, but for it to be something that actually gave people hope peace and joy, a hope peace and joy that they have lived without for far too long.

The third thing that sprang to my mind was gifts and I recalled the lesson we heard from 1 Corinthians. Paul says there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, varieties of service but the same Lord and a variety of activities but the same God who activates all of them. In everyone to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

So many people go through life believing that what they have is worth nothing apart from what other people think of them never recognizing the gifts that God has given them and they are conned into accepting the worlds values about things like choices about work and career rather than responding to the desires and talents that God has planted within them. I wonder what would this Church this community this world be like if everyone was enabled to use there gifts in the service of all and for the glory of God, each person knowing that they were contributing towards something bigger than themselves and in the process becoming more and more the person God created them to be. What would that be like?

So what would the Church really be like if it was filled with Gods Spirit? This Spirit that at times is like the breath of God, sometimes a rushing wind enough to shake the foundations of the world. At times a dove at times tongues of living fire. What would such a Church be like? What would such a world be like with a Church like that in it? Well it would be as many and varied as it is now. The Holy Spirit is not partial to a Church of one flavor or another because God wants to breathe his life into every gathering of his people.

It used to be said that the Church of God had a mission to the world. We have now worked out that it is the God of mission that through his Spirit has a church in the world. We want to be a part of a Church that is taking part in Gods mission that is part of Gods communication of himself to this world. So no matter what style of Church we are formal or informal evangelical catholic traditional modern loud or quiet no matter what kind of music we sing no matter what label we might give ourselves let us be a church that pulsates with the very life of God let us be prophetic let us be communicative let us celebrate the gifts that God has given us. Let us be a church and a community that is filled with the Holy Spirit the very breath of Gods life so that we can breathe that life into the world. Amen.