

Pentecost Eucharistic Vigil  
08.06.2019

On Good Friday this year we reflected on the completion of the Saviour's work on Calvary's Hill. In our meditation of John's Passion Narrative, we paid particular attention to the words Jesus pronounced just before He breathed His last. We recalled how He cried out with a loud voice: *It is accomplished*. We are told in the gospel text how just after that moment a soldier pierced Christ's side with a lance and from it streamed forth blood and water.

In the light of faith, we understand Jesus' death to have been a passage – the great passage from death to life. In His person, Christ fulfilled the *Pascha* of God's People. The fact that Jesus' passing was verified by the blood and water that poured forth from His open heart, pierced by the lance, reminds us of many Scripture passages. We think of Isaiah's prophetic words and many other Scripture texts which invite us to *come to the waters*. We remember too Ezekiel's prophecy about water flowing from the right side of the temple. The mention of blood has us think about the blood which was daubed on the lintels of the Hebrews' houses, to mark them as the homes of God's Chosen People, which the angel of death was to pass over on the night of the exodus. Comes to mind at the same time that story which is so central to the Easter Vigil: the passage in the Book of Exodus which recounts for us how the waters were parted, permitting the Israelites to pass dry-shod through the gap created. This singular event marked the great passage of God's People from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Land of Promise.

Pentecost is also an accomplishment. It marks the completion of our Easter journey. Just as the initial *Pascha* was a passage moment, giving new life to God's People, so our celebration of this liturgical feast of Pentecost, marked by this Solemn Eucharistic Vigil, has us recall the birth of the Church and the gift of new life for the whole of humanity which came about with the outpouring of the Spirit upon the first disciples.

Our celebration of Pentecost is all about a new birth for us. It heralds a fresh start for each one of us who are gathered here tonight. If only we consent to the gift offered to us on the Sacred Night a new beginning is offered to us.

Significantly, on this Sacred Night the symbol of water is drawn to our attention more than once, but especially in and through the words of the gospel passage listened to.

We will recall the place this same symbol of water held in the course of the Easter Vigil. The Blessing of the Font used at the Easter Vigil brought home to us the fundamental place of water in the Creation and Redemption stories – and at so many other passage moments recorded for us in the Bible.

The words of Jesus in the gospel text just read could not be any clearer. All who are thirsty are to dare to approach the Lord to have their thirst slaked. Christ speaks of springs of living water welling up inside those who come to Him, allowing Him to touch their lives by His grace.

Tonight Jesus invites you and me to come to Him to *drink in with delight* the free gift of the Spirit which is on offer. He invites us to become awakened to a renewed awareness of the living source which is there deep down within our hearts – waiting for us to tap into it. The Living Waters of which Jesus speaks can be thought of in terms of those waters upon which the Spirit hovered in the Creation Story.

Biblical thought assures us that *the water and the Spirit bring life*. We know already in the realm of nature how the coming of new life into this world is heralded by the breaking of waters and begins with the breathing of the breath of life. It is surely significant that in the spiritual life – at baptism – water has such an important place as well.

Why such an emphasis upon water?

Water washes clean and it purifies; water vivifies and refreshes... water moistens what has become arid; water softens what has become hardened... water revives what has become deadened; water brings fresh flowering to what has become a desert.

The *Sequence* of the liturgy of Pentecost attributes all these powers to the Spirit of God at work in the hearts of believers. We sang that text in English at the beginning of this celebration. I remind you of just some of the expressions found therein: *On our dryness pour Thy dew; Wash the stains of guilt away.*

For the great Irish monk, Saint Columbanus, to remind us in his writings: *The author of life is the fountain of life*. And he goes on to exhort us: *Let us seek the fountain of life, the fountain of living water, like intelligent and most wise fish, that there we may drink the living water that springs up to eternal life*. Through those words, Columbanus invites us to live our lives immersed in the font of life; to live our lives baptised in the Spirit of Christ. He invites us to be plunged into Christ and to live in Him as fish live in water.

Another Celtic writer takes up Columbanus' thought with the invitation: *Slake your thirst from the streams of the divine fountain*. The ancient text from which I quote goes on to say: *The fountain of life calls to us, 'Let whoever is thirsty come to me and drink.'* Take note what you are to drink; remember what God spoke through Jeremiah, *'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and drunk from leaking cisterns.'* For our Celtic writer to explain: *The person who thus drinks is the person who loves, who draws satisfaction from the Word of God, who adores, who yearns, who burns with the love of wisdom.*

May we become such persons: men and women who drink with delight at the source of life.

Let me suggest that we make our own on this Pentecost night a prayer composed by the Anglican priest Ray Simpson, who lived for many years surrounded by the constantly ebbing tides of Lindisfarne, Northern England's Celtic *Holy Island*.

This prayer resembles in some ways the great Sequence of the Feast, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, expanding it a little when it has us plead:

*Bathe us in Your cleansing rivers.*

*Soak us in Your healing waters.*

*Drench us in Your powerful down-falls.*

*Cool us in Your bracing baths.*

*Refresh us in Your sparkling streams.*

*Master us in Your mighty seas.*

*Calm us in Your quiet pools.*

*Veni Sancte Spiritus!*