



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

31st MAY 2020

EASTER 7

READINGS FOR TODAY Acts 2 v 1 - 21; 1 Corinthians 12 v 3b - 13; John 20 v 19 - 23	PARISH OFFICE: Closed until further notice. TEL:01252 331161; e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – 01252 321517 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
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**ALLELUIA, CHRIST IS RISEN!
HE IS RISEN INDEED, ALLELUIA!**



SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT
(by ST BASIL THE GREAT 330 – 379 AD)

‘To the Spirit all creatures turn for their sanctification; all who live virtuously seek him, and are, by his influence, refreshed and helped towards their own natural end. He is the source of holiness, the light of our understanding, for to every mind he offers his own light for the discovery of truth.

Though by nature he is inaccessible, yet through his generosity we can receive him in ourselves. He fills all creatures with his power, but only those who are worthy can participate in him. But all do not share him in the same measure; he distributes his power in proportion to our faith.

He is simple in essence, but manifold in power. He is present to each in his fullness, and in his fullness is present everywhere. He is divided, but does not suffer by the division; all share in him, but he remains whole, like a sunbeam whose kindly influence benefits each creature as though it were present to that creature alone, and shines over land and sea and dissolves in the air.

So too the Spirit is present like the sun to each individual who is capable of receiving him, and emits an influence which is sufficient to help them all, but is not divided; and they profit by sharing in him according to their natures, not according to his power.

Through him hearts are raised on high, the weak are led by the hand, those who are advanced gain perfection. He it is who shines on those whose hearts are purified and stainless and makes them truly spiritual through the common union they have through him.

Even as bright shining bodies, once touched by a ray of light falling on them, become even more glorious and themselves cast another light, so too the souls that carry the Spirit, and are enlightened by the Spirit, become spiritual themselves and send forth grace upon others.

So is their joy unending, so is their perseverance in God unending, so do they acquire likeness to God, so – most sublime of all – do they themselves become divine.’

(St Basil was born of a Christian family at Caesarea in Cappadocia (modern Turkey) in the year 330. Outstanding in learning and virtue he began to lead a retired life but in the year 370 he was appointed Bishop of Caesarea. He combated the Arian heresy (those who said that Jesus wasn't God but was created, like us), wrote much of value, especially the monastic rules which even today are followed by many monks of the Eastern church. He was outstanding in helping the poor. He died 1st January 379.)

COLLECT FOR THE WEEK DAYS AFTER PENTECOST

O Lord, from whom all good things come:
grant to us your humble servants,
that by your holy inspiration
we may think those things that are good,
and by your merciful guiding may perform the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

There is a free national phone line ‘Daily Hope’ that offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services. Available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TREASURER SHEILA TAYLOR

I have had many questions about the “envelope” giving, what should you do with it? If you would like to make payment to the PCC, bank details are as follows:

Bank: Natwest Bank Plc. 30 Wellington Street, Aldershot. GU11 1AE
Account Name: PCC of St Peter's, Ash
Account Number: 50140256
Sort Code: 60 01 08

Please make sure you include your name.

Or you could write a cheque and send it to me, enclosing one of the weekly envelopes. Send your cheque to: Father Keith, The Rectory, Ash Church Road, Ash, Surrey. GU12 6LU Thank you on behalf of the PCC and keep safe and keep well.

Morning Prayer to share at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticle. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) Alleluia, Christ is risen!
All: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

(L) O Lord, open our lips
All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) Jesus Christ, whom we worship, is our crucified, risen and ascended Lord and we have walked with him through his journey of love. We have faced the agony of his suffering and death on a cross. We have rejoiced at his bursting free from the bonds of death. We have enjoyed his risen presence with us and his revelation of himself through the breaking of bread. We have seen his return to the throne before which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that this Jesus is Lord. And now, with the followers of his own time, we await the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, his gift to his people, through whom we make Christ known to the world.

(L) Send your Holy Spirit upon us,
All: and clothe us with power from on high. Alleluia.

This hymn is said or sung:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
and lighten with celestial fire;
thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life and fire of love;
enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face
with the abundance of thy grace;
keep far our foes, give peace at home;
where thou art guide no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but one;
that through the ages all along
this may be our endless song:

Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

(L) Blessed are you, creator God,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As your Spirit moved over the face of the waters
bringing light and life to your creation,
pour out your Spirit on us today
that we may walk as children of light
and by your grace reveal your presence.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
All: Blessed be God for ever.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

Pause to call to mind our sins and confess them to God:

(L): You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:
Lord, have mercy.
All: Lord, have mercy.

(L): You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:
Christ, have mercy.
All: Christ, have mercy.

(L): You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided:
Lord, have mercy.
All: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, we pray,
and bring us to everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

(L) Let us pray that the Spirit will work through our lives
to bring Christ to the world:

All: God, who as at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a right judgement in all things
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

*Read Acts 2 v 1 - 21 followed by Psalm 104 v 26 - 37,
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read 1 Corinthians 12 v 3b - 13

All: Alleluia, alleluia! Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of
your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your
love. Alleluia!

*Now read John 20 v 19 - 23. Here are some thoughts from
Fr Keith on today's readings:*

'This pandemic has given us several new phrases – 'self-isolating', 'social-distancing', 'clap-for-carers', and now 'the new normal'. We are still not quite sure what that last one is going to look like, but, it made me think, on this Day of Pentecost, that for the first Apostles their lives from then on also took on a 'new normal'. Their days of fishing on the Sea of Galilee, or sitting at the tax collectors' table, or

belonging to 'the Zealots' (whoever they were!), were all in the past. The descent of the Holy Spirit made sure of that. They would never be the same again!

Pentecost, or Shavuot, as Jews more commonly know it, is a one day festival that is celebrated 50 days (50 = Pente in Greek) after Passover. In the Old Testament it is described as a harvest festival (Exodus 23 v 16), but it later became associated with the theme of God's covenant with the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law (the Torah). The timing of the gift of the Holy Spirit at this feast, is, therefore, of great symbolic significance.

The old Law of Moses was given so that the people of Israel would know how God expected them to live and behave when they reached the promised land. Central to that Law was their duty to put God first and love their neighbours as themselves. Jesus re-emphasised those two points, as the underlying principles for life with God, in His ministry here on earth. Now that he had left them, the giving of the Holy Spirit – 'to lead them into all truth' – tells us that that duty to God and to neighbours is at the heart of what God expects from us under the 'new covenant' too. Pentecost is our 'Mount Sinai', only, this time, the Law isn't written on tablets of stone, to be stored in a holy place – the Temple, but written on our hearts, to be carried within us everywhere we go. As Peter reminds his listeners, in Acts 2 v 16, the prophet Joel had looked forward to this day 'I shall pour out my Spirit on all flesh' (Joel 3 v 1) – it was a sign that the messianic era was dawning and the Day of the Lord was near.

This 'new normal' was to mean a change in lifestyle, not just for those early Apostles, but for all those who would listen to their words and come to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit would be inside them to strengthen, guide and support them in living their lives in accordance with God's will for them, and in the important task - to go and make disciples of all nations and baptise them. On the day of Pentecost itself Peter made a good start. The Jews, who were in Jerusalem for the festival, came from all over the Empire, but the Holy Spirit made sure that language was no barrier to the spread of the gospel message. All of them could understand what Peter was saying and 'that very day about three thousand were added to their number' (Acts 2 v 41).

Not all were convinced though – some put the disciples exuberant behaviour down to drink! Perhaps the fact that Peter didn't pull any punches, about who was to blame for Jesus death at the hands of the Romans, didn't help! But the truth had to be told, and on this first day of the 'new-normal' Peter let the Holy Spirit guide him into saying what he knew would make him some enemies. That, of course, was to be the pattern for all of the followers of Jesus down the centuries to follow, and it cost many their lives. Still, in spite of all of the obstacles, the gift of the Spirit has enabled the Faith to spread to the whole world. A tiny band of people, in an obscure province, of a once mighty empire, changed the course of world history because of what God empowered them to do by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, caught up as we are, in a time that is far from 'normal', what can we take from the story of Pentecost to encourage us? The church tells us that, by virtue of our baptism and confirmation, we too carry within us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But, if you are anything like me, sometimes it doesn't feel like that! At least, not if we imagine that we should be always feeling as much enthusiasm and energy as Peter and the rest demonstrated 2000 years ago. Our faith may be strong, but perhaps we feel inadequate and scared when faced with that call to mission and evangelism, which they embraced so well. How can we even begin to measure up to their standard? Our reading from 1 Corinthians this morning can, perhaps, give us some comfort. In talking about the Holy Spirit, Paul makes it clear that all Christians aren't given all of the gifts

of the Spirit. We don't have to be good at everything. There are varieties of gifts and varieties of service, he says, all working for the common good. These gifts are allotted as the Spirit chooses, and they are designed to work together, as do the different parts of the body - not in competition with each other, but in harmony. Unity of purpose is the key. If we stick together we will achieve great things – much more than on our own.

So, we needn't worry if we personally can't utter words of wisdom, or we aren't healers, or good at different languages – those things will be covered by others within Christ's church. Our job is to get on with what God has made us good at, for the advancement of His kingdom. At the moment that may involve just setting a good example, in our 'new-normal', of acting responsibly: ensuring we are caring for others and not endangering them by how we go about our daily business. Social – distancing still!

When we can meet together again as a congregation, we will be taking up the ideas from our 'Vision Sunday' back in March. In the meantime we can all be praying for the guidance of the Spirit in how we are to move St Peter's forward. One thing is for certain – we haven't been given the Holy Spirit to keep him to ourselves, or stored away for safe keeping in our temple – the church building. Even when we have to say hard things, we should take our cue for Peter and let the Spirit speak through us. Only then will people be able to fully enjoy life in the 'new-normal' that He wants for them – that is to say to become citizens of His own perfect Kingdom, for ever.'

Pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*All Christ has gone up on high
and has led captivity captive. Alleluia.*

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.

- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All Christ has gone up on high
and has led captivity captive. Alleluia.

Our prayers today are written by Ceri Hurcombe:

Take a moment to listen to the beating of your heart, the blowing of the wind, the singing of the birds and the movement of the Spirit. Be silent said the Lord and know that I am God.

Holy Spirit, inspire us to hear the cry of those who are silent. Help us to reach out to those who are lonely, those who are sick in body or mind. We pray especially for those which this long time of isolation has been a challenge. We pray for those living in homes which are not peaceful, for those with anxiety and for those who are lonely.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us

Holy Spirit, flow through us, fight our fears, sweep away our apathy, blow down barriers which separate us from others and help us to reach out as Jesus showed us with warm and open hearts.

Holy Spirit, fill us with a gentle breeze of confidence and life. Empower us to use our voices in our loud proclamation.

Holy Spirit, ignite the flame within us to share our faith with others. We give thanks for all who support our journey in faith. We are blessed to have Keith and Carol reaching out to our community during this current crisis and we celebrate all those who usually worship at St Peters who have maintained a sense of togetherness through this time of change. We count our blessings for all people who have reached out to us at this time.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us

Holy Spirit, move around those who are sick and give healing. Encourage hope in those who are scared or grieving and warm the hearts of all those who are sad. We pray for all those who have died recently and for their families coming to terms with their loss. We bring to mind in a moment of silence those who we miss from our own lives.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us

This Pentecost, Spirit of God, be with us when we stand together in faith, in solidarity with all people. Spirit of God, fill us with warmth and light us with a desire to act in your name.

Today, as we commit ourselves once more to your work we ask you to show us how to hold the needs of your world at the heart of our lives and to celebrate the gifts you provide with joy. Amen

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may then be said or sung:

The Spirit lives to set us free,
Walk, walk in the light.
He binds us all in unity,
Walk, walk in the light.

*Walk in the light,
Walk in the light,
Walk in the light,
Walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,
Walk, walk in the light.
The dead were awakened by his call,
Walk, walk in the light.
Chorus

He died in pain on Calvary,
Walk, walk in the light.
To save the lost like you and me,
Walk, walk in the light.
Chorus

We know his death was not the end,
Walk, walk in the light.
He gave his Spirit to be our friend,
Walk, walk in the light.
Chorus

The Spirit lives in you and me,
Walk, walk in the light;
His light will shine for all to see,
Walk, walk in the light.
Chorus

Let us pray:

Faithful God, who fulfilled the promises of Easter by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation the way of life eternal: open our lips by your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(L) Today we have remembered the coming of God's power on the disciples and we invite that same Spirit to drive us out into the wild places of the world.

All: May the Spirit, who hovered over the waters when the world was created, breathe into us the life he gives. May the Spirit, who overshadowed the Virgin when the eternal Son came among us, make us joyful in the service of the Lord.

May the Spirit, who set the Church on fire upon the Day of Pentecost, bring the world alive with the love of the risen Christ, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us now and always. Amen.

(L) Filled with the Spirit's power, we go in the light and peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

All Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

Evening Prayer

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, ♦
you that by night stand in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary ♦
and bless the Lord.
The Lord who made heaven and earth ♦
give you blessing out of Zion.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

1. O Thou who camest from above,
fire celestial to impart
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart.
2. There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.
3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.
4. Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make my sacrifice complete.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon (Visitation of Mary) 122; Tue 135;
Wed 136; Thurs 138; Fri 145; Sat 97 & 98, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

- 1 Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ♦
whose judgements are true and just.
- 2 Praise our God, all you his servants, ♦
all who fear him, both small and great.
- 3 The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns: ♦
let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.
- 4 For the marriage of the Lamb has come ♦
and his bride has made herself ready.
- 5 Blessed are those who are invited ♦
to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦
be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

Readings:

Monday: Zechariah 2 v 10 – end; John 3 v 25 - 30
Tuesday: Job 2; Romans 1 v 18 - end
Wednesday: Job 3; Romans 2 v 1 - 16
Thursday: Job 4; Romans 2 v 17 - end
Friday: Job 5; Romans 3 v 1 - 20
Saturday: Exodus 34 v 1 – 10; Mark 1 v 1 - 13

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

You have done great things, O God, and holy is your
name.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

You have done great things, O God, and holy is your
name.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is
ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world
and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

O Lord, from whom all good things come: grant to us
your humble servants, that by your holy inspiration we
may think those things that are good, and by your
merciful guiding may perform the same; through our
Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all
evermore. Amen.

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED,
ESPECIALLY:

ROY LAMB; CALEB PERFECT; JOHNNY JONES
ANNIE TYLER; AWAIS ALI

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of
God, rest in peace. Amen.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY SUNDAY

Isaiah 40 v 12 – 17 & 27 – end; 2 Corinthians 13 v 11 – end;
Matthew 28 v 16 - 20

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK TO:

BRIAN BLACKBURN (4TH); CAROLYN HILLIAR (6TH)

Pentecost and the Humbling of the Human Race

Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21, John 20:19-23

Transcript of today's sermon by Bishop Andrew

(This can also be watched on YouTube online)

'The humbling of the human race'. It's a rather dramatic phrase that's gaining currency right now to describe the events of the past few months: events that have been so extraordinary in their impact, so universal in their reach, that even the most apparently overblown of expressions seems somehow appropriate for the days that we're living through.

The experience of being humbled is, of course, a mixed one. We use it positively in the context of promotion, or the receiving of a prize or award, to which one common response is to say, 'I feel deeply humbled to be standing here today'. That was certainly my sense when I first preached from the pulpit of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, at my inauguration as Bishop of Guildford a little more than five years ago.

But then there's the more apparently negative aspect of being humbled too: of being publicly exposed, perhaps, as a hypocrite or a fraud, of making a serious error of judgment or jeopardising a close relationship through our sheer stupidity, of recognising that we don't have all the answers, in fact we haven't a clue what to do next. For most of us, for most of the time, we like to feel that we're in charge of events, that we're masters of our fates and captains of our souls, that we're in control, with our anxieties and weaknesses kept well under wraps – an illusion that can stay intact for years on end, especially if we have the education and confidence and wealth to sustain it. And yet, illusion it is. And there's a little part of us that knows that even the most challenging aspects of being humbled may be far from pleasant but they're probably good for the soul, so long as they don't stray too far into the territory of humiliation. People we know who've been through humbling times are so much more human than they were before, gentler, kinder, more understanding and approachable; and perhaps that's true of us too. The old bravado's gone, and in our better moments we thank God for it.

And as we come to Pentecost 2020, and to our three Bible Readings this morning, there's a sense in which that phrase 'The humbling of the human race' seems particularly pertinent.

We have here the account of the building of the Tower of Babel, the last great story in the primeval accounts of Creation and Fall and global catastrophe that make up the first eleven chapters of the Bible, charting the sheer mess that the remaining 1178 chapters of the Bible are designed to sort out. And this Tower of Babel – perhaps inspired by stories of a massive construction in Babylon, the mighty Ziggurat Etemenanki, 91 metres high – represents the bravado of the human race at its brash: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves..."; to which the Lord

responds first with a somewhat anxious observation, "This is only the beginning of what they do; nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them" and then with a judgement designed among other things to save them from themselves: "Let us confuse their language now, so that they will not understand one another's speech". It's an archetypal story of the dangers posed by the creation and evolution of the human race, this extraordinarily powerful and complex species, with the ominous phrases 'only the beginning' and 'nothing will now be impossible for them' taking on sinister new overtones in a world post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima, post the beginnings of a potentially catastrophic change in the global climate and ecology.

And if the 'humbling of the human race' is at the heart of the story of the Tower of Babel, it's at the heart of our current Covid crisis too. Suddenly – in a very short space of time – so many of the old certainties have been swept away, along with a whole host of freedoms that we've always taken for granted. Something approaching normality will no doubt return at some point in the future. But meanwhile how important to pray that we might learn the lessons from this time – lessons about the fragility of our human strength and wisdom in the face of an awesome Creator and a Creation which St. Paul describes as 'groaning as in the pains of childbirth'. 'Come, Holy Spirit' seems the best prayer for a world in desperate need of the comforting, empowering, humbling, strengthening presence of the Living God.

It's not simply the world that needs humbling, though. It's also the Church, the people of God. The setting of our Gospel reading wasn't the mighty Ziggurat Etemenanki in Babylon. It was rather the great Temple in Jerusalem, as recently renovated and extended during the long reign of Herod the Great. In previous centuries the prophet Ezekiel had had a vision of water flowing from the altar of this Temple, bringing life and refreshment wherever it went – a vision that inspired literally millions of pilgrims to travel to Jerusalem for one of the big three festivals of the Jewish year, of which the Feast of Tabernacles was the busiest and most crowded of them all. And in that most impressive of religious buildings, on the last and greatest day of that most impressive of religious feasts, a Galilean preacher had the temerity to shout out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. [For] out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'. Within less than forty years, of course, that mighty Temple would be destroyed, but the rivers of living water – the lifegiving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ – would be spreading rapidly across the Roman world.

And our beautiful church buildings haven't suffered the fate of Herod's Temple, thank God. But they are locked for the second great festival of the Christian year: first Easter, now Pentecost; and that's been a salutary and humbling experience for us all, as we've had to make do with virtual Eucharists on dining tables and makeshift worship of varying qualities. Of course we've been regularly reminded over this time that the Church isn't the building, it's the people – and that reality has been lived out in a host of impressive ways since the lockdown began. But today's gospel would take that somewhat cliched phrase one step further: the church is not the building, we learn: it's those who believe in Jesus and are overflowing with his Spirit. So that 'Come, Holy Spirit' seems the best prayer too for a church in desperate need of the comforting, empowering, humbling, strengthening presence of the Living God.

And then there's the Day of Pentecost, itself, and our reading from the book of Acts: and perhaps Pentecost is about something more personal than the humbling of the human race or of the people of God. It's about the humbling of individual women and men - 3000 of them in all from a whole rollcall of different nations – who witnessed the presence of the Holy Spirit in the faces of those first

disciples and who responded to the preaching of Peter (trying his hand out as a fisher of people) in repentance, faith and baptism. Peter certainly didn't mince his words that day: 'You killed Jesus!' was his message to the crowd, those bloodcurdling cries of '*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*' a couple of months before still ringing in his ears. Yet here was a good humbling, a message that the people knew they desperately needed to hear. And so began the story of the church, a great multitude now from 'every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages' which is always at its best and most fruitful and Spirit-filled, when it humbles itself before the mighty hand of God. And as we too are humbled during this time – perhaps feeling useless in our social isolation, or recognising that we've drifted far from God and have needed the short sharp shock of Covid to bring us back, 'Come, Holy Spirit' seems the best prayer for us *personally* as well, as we stand in desperate need of the comforting, empowering, humbling, strengthening presence of the Living God.

'The humbling of the human race'. As we return to that haunting phrase, we're reminded again that being humbled can have an unashamedly, positive connotation: 'I feel deeply humbled to be standing here today', as the latest Nobel Laureate or Booker prize winner puts it. And here's the extraordinary thing on this Pentecost Sunday: that despite all the dangers posed by the creation and evolution of the human race, this extraordinarily powerful and complex species, God hasn't abandoned us, but has rather chosen to give us new power, the power of the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is quite the opposite of the brashness and bravado that characterised the builders of the Tower of Babel. For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Those anxious observations in the Babel story, with the ominous phrases '*only the beginning*' and '*nothing will now be impossible for them*' remain an ever-present danger when it comes to that perilous combination of human ingenuity on the one hand and a skewed moral compass on the other. But as we humbly bow the knee before Jesus, our Servant King, and receive the empowering of His Spirit, so we recognise a new reality – that as Jesus once put it, 'Without me, you can do nothing'; and as St. Paul continued, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'.