

Pentecost (ABC)

We're struck when we see on the telly a long since deceased person making a speech while they were still alive – speaking from beyond the grave as it were. The person may be dead but their words come to life.

Well, it's the Holy Spirit who brings alive the words of Jesus in the Bible and makes them relevant for us now. In the Mass, for instance, we ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine so that they become Christ's body and blood for us here and now. In imparting the Spirit to the apostles, Jesus first breathed on them. We often use the same language when things begin to stagnate – 'we breathe new life into a situation'. When St John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962 he said that he wanted to open the widows of the church and let in some fresh air even though back then it seemed more like a cyclone.

The Holy Father said last year, "I need the constant outpouring of the Holy Spirit if my spiritual life is not to stagnate". Stagnation and sin are bedfellows. Our spiritual growth will have stagnated if we're doing nothing about ingrained habits of sin in our day to day lives. For instance we can be so used to lying or swearing that these sins become part of who we are - we become immune to their ill effects on others. In his first sermon at Pentecost, Peter urged the people to repent or else the action of the Holy Spirit will be restricted.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by extraordinary phenomena like a mighty wind and an earthquake. His influence, however, is more like a gentle breeze. A true sign of the Spirit's anointing is when we feel close to Our Lord in everyday life. The love of God may be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit but that love has to flow out from our hearts into our hands and feet and inform how we live.

The late Cardinal Suenens - quite a charismatic figure in his day - described what the Church might be like if we don't give the Holy Spirit free reign. He says:

Without the Holy Spirit, God tends to be distant. Christ stays in the past. The Gospel is a dead letter. The Mass becomes wearisome, even boring. Morality is a slavish adherence to rules and regulations.

But with the Holy spirit God is near, Christ is with us in the here and now - especially at Mass, the gospel is the living Word of God which moulds the way I live. With the Holy Spirit the church is a vibrant faith filled community. Morality is inspired by love and comes from within. With the Holy Spirit my life is characterised by inner peace and joy even in the midst of turmoil, 'solace in the midst of woe'

With this in mind we pray all the more earnestly: 'Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your divine love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the Earth'.