

## Easter 6a SFX Conventual Mass

There a story from the fifteenth century of a church official making a visitation in rural parts who questioned a farming lad as to whether he knew the essentials of the Christian faith. "Tell me", he said, "who is the Father, who is the Son, and who is the Holy Ghost?" The lad leant on his stick and thought for a moment. "Well", he said, "I know who the Father is, and the Son, because they live in the Manor and I do look after their sheep. But this other fellow, this Holy Ghost, I don't know anyone in the village of that name."

One of the loveliest of the Easter stories is of the disciples huddled together, afraid in the Upper Room. It is the evening of Easter Sunday and Jesus appears amongst them, showing them his wounds and saying: "Peace be with you." And he breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Was this the moment he promised when at the Last Supper when he said to them – I am not going to leave you alone? I am not going to leave you orphans. They had been nervous and afraid, because Jesus was their Advocate – their support, their cheerleader, their comforter, all that is meant by the word Paraclete. Jesus had been their first Advocate who opened the heavens for them, brought the Father close to them, gave them a sense of who they were and to whom they belonged. But he would be taken from their midst.

It must be a terrible thing to be an orphan, to be left in the world without the guidance of elders, the support of loved ones. Most here will know what it is like to experience the loss of someone who was their source of strength, of comfort, support and guidance. Rudderless on the troubled waters of the world.

We first hear of the Spirit in the first Chapter of the Bible hovering over the waters of the earth, bringing life from a formless void. Jesus now breathes this same Spirit over the disciples to form them, to shape them and give them a sense of themselves as his people, beloved of the Father as knew himself to be. We too are to receive that same Spirit to encourage us and egg us on with his love, wisdom and strength. "I will not leave you orphans."

"I believe in the Holy Spirit" we say it every week. And, yes "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Without the Spirit nothing makes sense. Either the Spirit of God who created us is alive in us, either the Spirit of Jesus is with us, or we must shut up shop. I believe that the Spirit spoke through the prophets, to wake up the world to God's justice. I believe that the Spirit hovered over a young woman in Nazareth and gave God's son to the world. And I believe that at every Mass the Spirit comes down upon the gifts we bring to the altar to make Jesus present in our midst. And being present, Jesus gives us his Spirit. As we receive Holy Communion we receive fire – as St Ephrem says – we receive that same Spirit to make us more fully alive, and send us animated with God's love of out into the world.

Yes, I know that quite often we don't know it or feel it. God can seem distant and far away, his truths difficult to take hold of. But the Spirit is there as much as the breath we breathe, and in such moments we need to say "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life."

Christ promised to remain with us in his Spirit, but do we consciously dwell in the Spirit so as to remain in Christ? Christ remains in us, but do we remain in him? There are many ways to stay close to Christ, but are we proactive in doing so? The Holy Spirit doesn't shout. Do I find those moments for quiet prayer and hear the still small voice of God speaking to us? Do I stop to search my conscience and seek the Spirit's guidance about the ways we should act in this world? Do I listen to God's word to seek his light for our path? Am I conscious that every Mass is a Pentecost, and we receive Fire to animate and enliven us as we go out into the world. When we receive Christ we receive the Spirit of Christ. Are we conscious of the Holy Spirit hopping between our hearts as we take out Christ's love to the world, the poor, the needy the sick. "I will not leave you Orphans." Christ leaves the world his Spirit in us.

What difference does it make to believe in the Holy Spirit? In 1968, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, the eminent orthodox bishop, Metropolitan Ignatios of Latakia (ancient Laodocia) summed up the difference the Spirit makes.

Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away,  
Christ stays in the past,  
the Gospel is a dead letter,  
the Church is simply an organisation,  
authority a matter of dominion,  
mission a matter of propaganda,  
the liturgy no more than an evocation,  
Christian living a slave morality.

But in the Holy Spirit:  
the cosmos is resurrected and groans with  
birth-pangs of the Kingdom,  
the risen Christ is there,  
the Gospel is the power of life,  
the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,  
authority is a liberating service,  
mission is a Pentecost,  
the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,  
human action is God's work in the world.

*Quoted by Cardinal Suenens in 'A New Testament' p.19 and 20.*

Without the Spirit Christ remains in the past, the Church is little more than a museum of curiosities. But with the Spirit the Church is a living body that moves across the pages of history, Christ speaks with a living voice and the church grows and changes across time. And love is the language of the Spirit, who continues to teach us and lead us to the truth of things. The Church is the Community of the Risen Lord animated by his Spirit. We are people of hope because we believe in the Holy Spirit.