

Today we commemorate Pentecost Sunday, celebrated 50 days after Easter Sunday. It is a commemoration of the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and the other early followers of Jesus.

This event occurred while the Jews were in Jerusalem celebrating Shavuot, the Jewish Feast of Weeks. Many of us today celebrate Pentecost as the birth of the Christian Church.

The message of Pentecost obviously is hugely dependent upon our understanding of what the Holy Spirit really is. And that understanding is difficult for me, and for many of us I'm sure. Is it a person? Is it a breath? Is it our conscience? Is it our quiet inner self? Is it a voice from within? Is it God?

Theologians tell us that the Holy Spirit is one third of God's triune nature. Our God is three persons, yet one God. The triune is God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit.

God the father is not God the Son; God the Son is not God the Holy Spirit; and God the Holy Spirit is not God the Father.

Yet God the Father is God.

God the Son, is God.

God the Holy Spirit is God.

One God, three divine persons; equal and eternal.

Some things are simply beyond my level of understanding, this is one of them.

But I believe that as a mere mortal, there are things about God that I am not meant to understand. There are things in the spiritual world which are simply beyond my ability to comprehend.

And yet I know the Holy Spirit, even though I can't define what He is. I know that He exists because I talk to Him every day and He speaks to me. I believe that when I say I'm just talking to myself, what I really mean is that I am talking to the inner voice within me, and that inner voice is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit talks to me about good and evil, and helps me to understand the difference. As C S Lewis wrote: "If there is no God, there can be no evil. Without God and the moral law He gives to us through the Spirit, evil would not exist.

Think about that for a moment. You cannot describe evil without borrowing from the Biblical concepts of right and wrong given to us by God through the Holy Spirit.

In the words of Lewis, "Man is the true cause of evil in world. When the restraining force of God and his knowledge are removed, evil is free to fully express itself."

God created beings which have free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. If a thing is free to be good, it is also free to be bad. Free will is what has made evil possible. Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love, or goodness, or joy worth having in life.

I speak to the Holy Spirit every day, throughout the day. He has been my moral compass throughout my life and He has carried me through many difficult periods. The events of the past ten weeks have been a particularly difficult time for all of us.

Particularly for those of us who have reached a mature stage of life in our seventies, eighties, and nineties, the Covid pandemic has been a frightening and depressing change in our lives.

I refer to those of us who are later in life because not only is the virus particularly threatening to the elderly, but because there is a psychological reality that really impacts us. We tend to think that our days on earth are fleeting and the quarantine has deprived us of precious days that we have left.

That is a very natural reaction to this crisis and I have not been immune to those feelings myself. However, what I have been able to do is to resort to a technique that Dale Carnegie refers to in his classic book, "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living."

Carnegie writes about a concept he describes as living in daylight compartments. He uses an ocean liner analogy, describing how the ship captain can seal off compartments known as bulkheads within the ship by closing heavy metal doors, thereby preventing the ship from sinking.

The metaphor of course is this: we close our mental bulkheads between the past and the future, and we gain peace of mind by focusing on today alone. Yesterday is past and gone; tomorrow is not yet here.

We are suddenly not wasting mental and emotional energy on predicting the future or trying to analyze the past. We are living in the precious present moment of each day, in our daylight compartment. We are alone in the present moment with the Holy Spirit.

Despite the limited days and years I have left in my life, I am happy to live each day as a gift from God and I thank the Holy Spirit each morning for giving me this day.

I now believe that I will stretch out into eternity, and in Heaven I will reflect upon my early days; days when it seemed God was down a dirt road walking towards me. Years ago, He was a speck in the distance. Now He is close enough that I can hear his singing; soon, I will see the lines on his face.

In describing the Holy Spirit, there are things you choose to believe, and beliefs that choose you. Christian faith chose me. I don't think you can explain how Christian faith works. It is a mystery. And I love this about Christian spirituality. It cannot be explained, yet it is beautiful and true.

It is something you feel and it comes from the soul.

Amen