

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 are as relevant as when they first spoke them.

Well, it's the Holy Spirit who brings alive the words of Jesus, spoken over 2000 years ago and makes them relevant for us today. In the Mass, for instance, we ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine so they become Christ's body and blood for us in the here and now. Anything to do with renewal or reform in the church is the field of the Spirit.

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 windows 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 go hand-in-hand. Scripture tells us that 'the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin' In his first sermon at Pentecost, Peter urged the people to repent if the Holy Spirit is to make inroads into their lives and help bring about the necessary change of heart.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by extraordinary phenomena like a mighty wind and an earthquake. However, I believe His influence is more like a gentle breeze. A true sign of the Spirit's anointing is when we forge a closer friendship with Jesus day by day. The Spirit will empower us, against all odds, to love as Jesus loves.

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 a chore. Morality is reduced to a slavish adherence to rules and regulations.

But with the Holy spirit, God is near, Christ is with us in the here and now. The words of the gospel impact us in a new way. With the Holy Spirit the church community is more animated. Morality is inspired by love and not a slavish adherence to laws. With the Holy Spirit my life is characterised by inner peace even in the midst of turmoil, - 'solace in the midst of woe'

With this in mind we pray all the more earnestly and especially today we pray for Stephen, John and David who will be confirmed presently - 'Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit to renew the face of the Earth'.