

SERMON 23.2.20 Last Sunday before Lent Christ Church 11a.m.

The Eucharist: Coming Alive by the Spirit

By Joy Dipple

Readings: Romans 12:1-2 Matthew 17:1-9

The Holy Spirit can reveal himself in many ways. It can be a powerful and sudden experience such as at Pentecost, which we see as the birthday of the Church, the moment when God's Spirit came to lead and guide his people into proclaiming the Gospel. It may even be in the mundane ordinary moments of life that God's presence is suddenly felt, such as whilst in the kitchen washing the dishes!

We can experience The Holy Spirit during prayerful quiet times; through reading or listening to God's word, or times when we come forward for prayer ministry for ourselves or the people we care about; and I have often felt the warmth of the Spirit when we have the opportunity to receive the oil of anointing. The list can go on and on.

But today we are talking about the significance of the Holy Spirit during the Eucharist itself as we come to the last of our talks about the Communion Service.

In the story of the Transfiguration the disciples were made aware of the divinity of Christ shining through his human frame, in a way that made them fearful and unable to know how to respond as they stood in the presence of divine holiness. In our humanity we come forward too into the presence of holiness as we receive the bread and wine of the Eucharist which is consecrated into holy symbols of Christ's crucified body and life giving blood.

The first Christians were accused of being cannibals as others witnessed those first communion services, and today there are different denominational understandings of what actually takes place at Communion. I do not wish to focus on those differences but to concentrate on our unity and the holiness of the Spirit that is present in the act of receiving; and how we can be strengthened by the Spirit to follow Christ with the renewing of our minds, as mentioned in our first reading from Romans chapter 12.

There is always the danger of being unprepared, or undervaluing the importance of the Eucharist. St Paul, who scares me a little, had strong words to say in his first letter to the Corinthians, because they had become flippant in their meetings. Instead of unity there were divisions, and people were seeing the Eucharist as an opportunity to gorge themselves with food whilst others went hungry. Paul asks them to eat at home instead, and he advises them to examine themselves in their behaviour before taking Communion.

The church is for sinners, even if we are redeemed. It is the reason why we regularly confess our sins at the beginning of our services, and why we still admit that we are unworthy to even consume the crumbs from under the table, and have to rely on God's mercy and grace.

There is a need for examination and in our present communion booklet on page 6, if you wish to look at it with me, we see in the words of the Peace that if we are bringing our gift to the altar and we remember that our brother or sister has a grievance against us, we are to leave our gift and not make an offering of it till we have gone and made peace first. We share peace in an act of unity, not bearing a grudge with our fellow believers.

As has been said in an earlier talk, we no longer need to bring sacrifices to the altar table because Jesus has become the sacrifice we need, and as we consume the bread and wine we ourselves become living sacrifices, sharing in the body and blood of Christ, and offering ourselves anew into his service. It echoes today's reading in Romans where we are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is our spiritual worship.

If we turn to the top of page 8 we are told that in this sacrament God feeds his people and strengthens us in holiness, so that the family of humankind may come to walk in the light of one faith, in one communion of love.

It is an act of the Holy Spirit that we are strengthened to walk in the ways of Christ, and we become especially aware of God's love for all. We are enabled to love with the love God gives by his Spirit, a love for one another, our fellow believers, fellow sinners, who are also redeemed by God's mercy, a mercy given through the Crucifixion.

The Greek word Epiclesis describes the part of the Eucharistic prayer where the presence of the Holy Spirit is invoked, or called upon, to bless the

elements and us, the communicants. We see this particularly on page 9 of our communion booklet, where it says at the top of the page: 'grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood', and then at the bottom of the page the words: 'as we eat these holy gifts in the presence of your divine majesty, renew us by your Spirit, inspire us with your love and unite us in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord'. We are to be renewed, filled with God's love and brought into the unity of the body of Christ, and of course the body of Christ is the Church.

Looking again at Romans chapter 12 we are told not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we can discern God's will for us. The Eucharist is one way in which we are transformed or strengthened by the Holy Spirit for God's service.

Something I read recently which may help us as we try and walk in God's ways is the following quote:

'Do nothing you would not like God to see.
Say nothing you would not like God to hear.'

There have been a couple of occasions when remembering that quote has enabled me to keep my mouth shut. Equally important the quote has also made me more aware of something I have said or done that I have had to repent of.

We are still going to fall short of God's call on our lives, but hopefully we can now see more fully how we can be strengthened for service by the action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist.

I will now finish with a prayer:-
Lord, as we reflect on your Holy presence through the Spirit in this Communion Service, fill us afresh with your love for one another, and equip us more fully to obey your call on our lives. Amen.