

Date: May 24, 2026 (The Day of Pentecost)

1. Texts: Acts 2:1-21; Ps. 104:25-35, 37; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23.
2. Subject: the Holy Spirit.
3. Topic: living in the Spirit.
4. Aim: educate, encourage.
5. Proposition: "We live in the Spirit by the Spirit's own choice."

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

The Pentecostal Churches tend to lay claim to the Holy Spirit and his gifts, as if the rest of us—and particularly the mainline Churches—do not really have access to the Spirit or his gifts. We pray by rote, using books. We're not spontaneous in worship. We Anglicans are too calm, too rational, too bound by our traditions. We're good, ol' "sticks in the mud". I've even heard a Pentecostal disciple say that, because a particular person doesn't speak in tongues, he's not really a Christian.

And, since such Pentecostal statements get all the press, we mainline denominations are left feeling a little "down-in-the-mouth". Plus, they've got the numbers and the money, so some Anglicans may even have doubts about the more traditional expressions of the Christian faith. After being exposed to Pentecostal theology, I've even heard some Anglicans wonder out loud about their own relationship with Jesus.

No one can fix all these misunderstandings in one sermon. The best we can hope for is to lay a balanced foundation on which we can build our relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's start with God.

In Christian thought, the word, "orthodox", means "right belief". This is different from the Orthodox Churches, such as the Greek, Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches. In our case, "orthodox" describes the fundamental truths held by Christian denominations across the globe and throughout the last 2,000 years.

Orthodox Christianity is Trinitarian. So, we must exclude the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unitarians from Orthodox Christianity. They are Christians sects or cults depending upon one's definitions. So, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Baptists and so on are orthodox, Trinitarian Christians. We all believe God exists as Creator, Saviour and Spirit Guide. So, the Creator is God, the Saviour is God and the Spirit is God. Please don't ask me to explain the spiritual physics of this unity of existence. All I can say is that Trinitarian Christianity is the only orthodox form of the faith. In this orthodox faith God is Creator, Saviour and Guide. Even we stick-in-the-mud Anglicans are part of this orthodox faith.

On Pentecost Day, we celebrate the movement of God. God moves from marching in front of the procession. He moves to marching in and with each individual within the Church. So, God is not just the model for behaviour, showing us what we should mimic. God lives within each transformed member of the Church, directing their ministries and thus the ministries of the Church from within.

This transformations occurs as God the Holy Spirit moves into our human spirits. It is actually God the Spirit who makes us Christian. Yes, we have to invite the transformation—we choose—but it is God alone who creates it.

Within the frameworks of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, the moment of our transformation most frequently occurs in baptism. Yes, this transformation must be renewed throughout our lives, but the moment of transformation is baptism.

So, if you have been baptized with water in the name of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your human spirit. Think of the honour God has done in your life: he has made you his temple. You are not just his representative—you re-present him to everyone you meet.

As a result of this transformation, God himself will decide what spiritual strengths and gifts he will give you.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.<sup>1</sup>

Or to put it in another way,

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.<sup>2</sup>

Or to put it in yet another way,

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

God makes the decisions. He dispenses his gifts. They come according to his will. They are not the result of our good deeds. We do not deserve or earn them. They do not prove our value or worth to God. Nor do they prove how special we are in the Church. The gifts and strengths of God prove only that he

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:4-8.

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

is generous and wise. Generous, because he gives good gifts. Wise, because he knows what gifts you need for the common good of the Christian community.

There are points at which our freewill comes into play. Yes, God acts. God decides. God gives. But we have to choose to receive. For most of us, our parents made the choice on our behalf, just as they chose what language we would speak and what moral framework would guide our growth in character. So, our parents chose to have us baptized. But as we mature in the faith, we also have to choose to accept his gifts. We have to choose to renew our faith commitment to God. We have to choose to receive his spiritual renewal of our lives. God gives, but we choose to receive and to use the gifts that he gives.

We are to use those gifts for the common good of the Christian community. We do not use them for our own benefit. We use them so that we might grow in grace and truth. We use them so that we might mature in the faith for the sake of the Christian community. We use them so that the Church finds support and guidance to the end that it is able to grow in numbers and in the faith. The spiritual gifts are given to us so that we might pass them on to the community for the sake of its life and growth.

That's the orthodox view of the nature of God and the gifts of the Spirit. That's a lot of theology for one sermon. But now we have to apply it to our lives — much easier said than done.

First, take pride in God's generosity and wisdom. Enjoy the truth that he has called you to salvation through the Anglican Church. In this way, refuse to accept anyone's false judgements that we are not Spirit-led. God gives us his gifts according to his assessment of our needs. Enjoy that generosity and wisdom.

Then, celebrate Pentecost by accepting God's gifts and using them for the sake of the Church. Try a prayer such as this one:

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Renew your presence in me. Fill my life to overflowing with your generous gifts. I accept whatever spiritual gift you choose to give me. I dedicate myself to using

your gifts for the health and benefit of the Church. Come, Holy Spirit, come and renew your life within me. Amen.

Lastly, be alert for the gifts God is giving you. Look out for them. Wonder about them. Ask questions of mature Christians. The gifts and qualities we've highlighted today may not yet be everyday experiences for you. You may have to look for them.

God has great things in store for us, even as stodgy old Anglicans who rely on our prayer books and hymnals. Sure, we aren't as spontaneous as some. Sure, we have to work to bring our liturgies and traditions to life. But we are as much part of that one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church as anyone else, and we have the gifts from God to prove it.

AMEN.