

THE HOLY SPIRIT



A reflection for Sunday 17th May
6th Sunday of Easter



‘The Holy Spirit

Andrew Carr, Reader, St Edmund & St Alban Dartford

Gospel reading: **John 14:15-21**

Click on the following link for the reading:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14%3A15-21+&version=NIVUK>

Today is the Sixth Sunday of Easter and Jesus was soon going to leave his disciples, but he would also remain with them... How?

By sending the Counsellor – the Holy Spirit – who would come after Jesus was gone to care for and guide the disciples then and now. The regenerating power of the Spirit came on the disciples just before Jesus’ Ascension to Heaven and the Spirit was then poured out on all the believers at Pentecost (31 May this year), shortly after the Ascension (21 May this year).

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within us and all believers, helping us live as God wants and building Christ’s church – His people, not the buildings they meet in – on earth. By faith we can appropriate the Spirit’s power each day.

The word translated into English (*paraklētōs* in the original Greek) as ‘Counsellor’ combines the ideas of comfort and counsel, and as one called alongside to help. And who among us wouldn’t want someone who was always there for us? The Holy Spirit is a powerful person on our side, working for and with us.

Sometimes we wish we knew the future (perhaps especially during this time of lockdown, isolation and distancing) so that we can prepare for it; the more so with various dates of easing of current restrictions being discussed. God alone knows what will happen, but he tells us all we need to know to *prepare* for the future. When we live by his standards, he will not leave us; he will come to us, he will be in us, and he will show himself to us. God knows what will happen and, because he will be with us through it all, we need not fear. We don’t have to know the future to have faith in God; we have to have faith in God to be secure about the future.

‘If only we’d been there when Jesus was around!’ people have been said to say. ‘It would have been so much easier. He would have explained everything to us, and told us what to do. And he’d have been such an engagement. Whatever we were doing, he’d be positive about it, and we’d want to go on and do even better.’

It's a common perception, but sadly a wrong one. The evidence of the four gospels suggests that the people who were around in Jesus' day didn't see it like that themselves. Some of his closest friends betrayed (Judas) and denied (Peter) him. Even the beloved disciple (John) ran away from the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was being arrested. Most people then couldn't really make him out, even the religious ones, perhaps especially the religious ones – compelling yes, puzzling definitely, mad possibly..? I'm reminded of C.S. Lewis' quote about Jesus:

“You must make your choice: either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The first verse of this passage is the most challenging and what the rest of this homily will focus briefly on: 'If you love me, you will obey what I command.' And what does Jesus command of those who love Him? Essentially these three things:

- (1) 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (Matthew 22:37-38)
- (2) 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matthew 22:39)
- (3) 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus says that if we truly love God and our neighbour (which is everyone else) we will naturally keep His commandments. Rather than worrying about all we *should not do*, we should concentrate on all *we can do* to show our love for God and for our neighbours. Jesus was with his disciples physically until the Ascension, and then spiritually through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit would be Jesus' presence that would never leave them and Jesus continues to be with us today through his Spirit. The disciples were commanded to baptise new believers because it symbolically unites the new believer with Jesus in their death to sin and resurrection to new life in Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolises submission to Jesus, a willingness to live God's way and identification with God's people. And again the promise in Jesus' third command – known as the Great Commission – to be with us always. If you take nothing else from these few words, do please take this promise to heart that He is with us always.

Please keep safe, please keep well.

AMEN