

*I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever.*

Today we recall the fulfillment of our Lord's promise to the disciples, and so also the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, that in His offspring all the nations should inherit a blessing. We might suppose that Jesus Himself is the blessing, which is true in one way, since He is the Messiah once offered for our salvation, but until the day of Pentecost that sacrifice remains simply His act of obedience to the Father—*not my will but thine*.

Only the sending of the Holy Spirit unites our story to His story, and therefore our life to God's. The Holy Spirit is God's will made available to each of us. The Holy Spirit connects our condemnation to the Passion of Jesus. Without Pentecost, in other words, the cross of Christ would have no effect for us, it would be an event lost in time. But because of Pentecost, our life is made present to the life and love of God in the person of our Saviour; our sin is brought to His cross as it were on the wings of the Spirit and the new life of His resurrection is shared with us like the olive branch which the dove brought to Noah.

The Holy Spirit unites our story and God's story. In this way the Day of Pentecost marks the beginning of a new life, for the Apostles, and for all Christ's followers, because it means that our former life - of being helplessly isolated and alone, of bearing all things for ourselves, and ultimately of leaving this life to suffer an eternal torment of loneliness - is over. *At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you*, Jesus told them. At this day.

Quite simply, we are free. Free of all the former things, and therefore free to love God, and to love one another. Free to share a life together. Free to dwell as one people, in the presence of God, who is not distant and terrifying, but present, and the assurance of our peace. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.* This is no longer a hope or a promise, it is the whole meaning of the word 'Christian.' So why do we continue to suffer under the pains of the old life, the life of doubt and fear and division and lonely hatred and petty grievances? There can only be one reason; simply this: that we have not accepted the gift. God has led us to the fountains of living water and we refuse to drink. We may make excuses, but there is no excuse—God has done all things for our new life in Him to appear fully and completely for each one of us. There is no impediment to heaven coming to each of us right now, other than our own unwillingness. Not our neighbour's annoying habits, not what happened to me at the hands of bullies, not the betrayal of a loved one, not too much to do, not my childhood, not my own sin - all those God has already suffered and presents Himself as our way of salvation and new life.

We remain in our old life, we remain apart from heaven, not by need, but by choice. We may make our excuses, but that is all that they are. The only one possible real excuse may be this: that we were never expressly, purely and simply, out loud and publicly told that this was so: well, now I am telling it. The Holy Spirit is as present to each of us as it was to the disciples on this day long ago. Their answer was a simple and absolute 'yes.' Their lives were a simple and absolute witness. All people, from all places, found in them the presence of the wonderful works of God. What will our answer be?