

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, which is probably the third most important feast in the Christian year. We rightly think of it as day the 'Church came to birth' (Preface of the Mass of Pentecost) and naturally make the link between a birthday and gifts.

It is good to reflect on all the readings we have at Mass today and notice how many gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be found in them.

In the First Reading (Acts 2:1-11) we see how the apostles were given the courage to preach to the gathered crowd about the marvels of God. We also hear about the 'gift of tongues or languages' the fact that everyone was able to hear and understand them in their own languages. I remember I was fortunate to be in Rome at Easter for six years as a seminarian and I would hear Pope John Paul II address the crowd in St Peter's square and throughout the world using many different languages including many languages that I didn't even know existed. Although I am sure he prepared and practiced his Easter greetings beforehand this was still an example of the 'gift of tongues', that the successor of St Peter could proclaim to the world that 'Christ is Risen' and everyone could hear him in their own language.

We are able to acknowledge the above as a gift of the Spirit not principally because of the vast number of languages that the message was proclaimed in but above all in what the message was. In the Second Reading (1 Cor 12:3-7.12-13) St Paul tells us that 'no one can say "Jesus is Lord" unless they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit'. The Spirit enables us to speak the truth about Jesus, to acclaim him as the Lord, to announce that he is truly Risen from the dead. St Paul also reminds us that the Holy Spirit unites us together as one body made up of many parts. Each one of us has a unique part to play and it is only when everyone is able to be that part of the body that they are called to be that the community of the church will flourish.

The Gospel Reading (John 20:19-23) is taken from the Gospel according to John and in the Johannine tradition Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples on the evening of Easter Day. In this account we see two further gifts of the Spirit, firstly peace and secondly the forgiveness of sins.

Neither should we forget the words of today's Psalm (103) which speaks of the presence of the Spirit in the works of creation and so calls us to 'wonder and awe in God's presence'.

So among the gifts of the Holy Spirit we can reflect on today we have; courage, languages, faith, unity, peace, forgiveness of sins, wonder and awe in God's presence. Such gifts are valuable at any time but perhaps especially necessary as we live through this particular time. We pray for these gifts for ourselves, and for all those most directly affected by the pandemic.

Midway through writing this sermon on Saturday afternoon I took a break to pray the Rosary with Pope Francis in the Vatican gardens and many others from various Marian shrines around the world. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McFy4NeU5tI> Here in Britain we have been asked to take part in a Rosary relay throughout Pentecost Sunday and as our diocese has been allocated a time slot between 10am and 11am and I know this is the time many of you will be watching our Mass I will say a decade of the Rosary at the end of Mass. You can complete the other decades in your own time later during the day.