

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Dear friends

If any evidence were needed that the event of Pentecost is of first importance for the Christian life and hope, it is here in what Paul says: *“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”*

The coming of the Holy Spirit is not an appendix (of minor importance) to the main story of Jesus Christ which ends or concludes with Jesus’ resurrection (Easter), but is very much a necessary part of Christ’s work on earth (for us!), which without it would not be on-going. Indeed, faith would not be going on, church would not be going on, Christian living would not be going on without the Spirit of God.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” The coming of the Holy Spirit is one in importance with everything Jesus does in the Gospels, it’s what it all leads to –

as Jesus himself pointed out to his disciples in his parting words to them, when he told them to wait for the power to be sent to them from the Father. But it is seen also at the beginning of John's gospel, where the significance of Christ's coming and work is put like this: *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* (Jn.1,12) And the witness of John the Baptist about Jesus made the connection to the Holy Spirit clear: *"he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* (Mt.3,11)

What happened at Pentecost, then, was and is no less definitive for the Christian faith and for the church than is any aspect of Jesus Christ's life, word and work.

In fact, without this event the Christian faith would have been something of a non-starter, it would have become like a present with nothing inside, a thing without content; and the church likewise – it would have become a mere shadow and an empty hull, quite unlike what by the Holy Spirit (!) it actually did become.

Let us understand this also as an explanation for why there may be such a thing as a faith that is Christian in name, but in practice turns out to have no particularly Christian content to it, that is, does not translate into love on the ground and obedience to God's will which is his children's joy and desire; and the same with church: why it can have the name, but not be the thing. It is the coming of the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit – that creates a church which is rich in real content, the content being Jesus Christ.

The word used in Acts 2 to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is telling – it’s the word “to fill”: “*it filled the whole house where they were sitting*” in verse 2, and then in verse 4: “*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*” But to fill is to supply a new content!

It is with a view to this ‘content’ that Scripture counsels Christians: “*Be filled with the Holy Spirit!*” The same is in view when Jesus says to his disciples: “*Receive the Holy Spirit*”. In numerous places in the book of Acts we are taught the connection there is between a faith that has real content and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

But let us ask: What happens in such filling? What of the content that is being supplied? It is instructive here to note that the people filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were mocked by onlookers who explained what they saw by saying: “*They are filled with new wine!*” In other words they said: “Look at them, no longer themselves, drunk, no longer with it, and it’s only 9 o’clock in the morning! Which means they are going to be of no use to anyone for the rest of the day!”

Not themselves – no use for the going concerns of the day, useless: this is the world’s perspective on the effect of the Holy Spirit on those who receive him; this is the world’s perspective on the Christian faith when it has content!

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we do become less in ourselves and less *of* ourselves: but we are not drunk, outside of a right mind or in a state of alienation, we are in fact more ourselves, truer to ourselves and truer to each

other, and less alienated. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we do become useless to the world: but we are not drunk or too inebriated to care or out of a right mind (as the world supposes!), we are useless to the world because we pay attention to the things of God and are useful to his purposes.

Surely this is what Peter described when he explained what was happening. “They are not drunk. They are less their old selves, yes, but they are truer selves; they are useless, but only because they are in fact becoming useful.”

The way Paul puts it, making clearer in the process the implication of it, is to say that those who are led by the Spirit are children of God. That is, they are no longer children of the world.

This speaks of real change; it is a change of content. For as children of the world what were we? What is the content of a child of the world? Paul describes it in the first chapter of this same letter: *“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled (!) with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full (!) of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.”* (Rom.1,28.29)

The spirit that holds sway here, says Paul, is that of slavery: as children of the world, we are constrained by the law of sin to do wrong, driven by our fears to seek our own best interests at a cost to others and in ways that are at odds with God.

But as children of God, he says, we have new and other content in us: new principles take the place of the old ones –

principles born of the Son's love for the Father and obedience to his will. They are the principles of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And they come to live and be productive in us through the Holy Spirit who fills us (= believers in Christ!). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, those who believe in Jesus Christ are established in a relationship with God as his children, to know, love and obey the Father from the heart. The Holy Spirit indwells those who believe in Jesus Christ so that Christ becomes their life's new content. [Fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.]

Dear friends, bearing these important truths about the Holy Spirit and about the place that being filled with Holy Spirit has for the life of faith and of the church, let us remember the promise that *"all who call on the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2,21). Let us call on him who became poor to make us rich, died to give us life and promised to send the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him.

AMEN