

the process works. God is looking to fill hearts that have been emptied.

If you feel that the flow of the Holy Spirit has been impeded, or is trickling rather than gushing through your life, why not pray and prepare for your own personal Pentecost? It may not be dramatic, you may not hear a violent wind or feel the lick of tongues of flame but you will begin to witness gradual or even swift and remarkable changes in yourselves and those you pray for...

Lastly, it would be helpful and encouraging if you could **'Pray for 5'** as per the Archbishop of Canterbury's recommendation. Pick 5 people and remember them in your prayers every day. Pray for the Spirit to enable them to experience the love of Christ. Pray that they come to 'know' Christ Jesus and call on his name. You may never know the results but you can be assured that God is faithful and will be operative in the lives of the people you pray for, whether you or they are aware of it or not.

Amen.

We should not be afraid to talk of the third person of the Trinity. Inclusion of the Holy Spirit is completely orthodox but often ignored. The Spirit is the life-giving agent, both in church communities and in individual lives. Inviting the Spirit into our midst means inviting unpredictability and upheaval, but also life, liberation, opportunity, growth on every level. Our conceptions about the Holy Spirit should not be coloured by a mid-80s Billy Graham rally or watching docu-dramas about fanatics in the American mid-West.

There are blocks to the Holy Spirit doing his work fully in us. Here are some of the most common spiritual blocks:

- **Doubt and intellectual pride**
- **Religious tradition** -being locked into certain ways of doing things
- **Fear of the supernatural**, of what cannot be easily or rationally explained
- **Unconfessed patterns of behaviour** – habits – or some area of life that we cannot consciously own or hesitate to share; lack of forgiveness, hard heartedness, a critical spirit. Because the Spirit is holy, our habits and attitudes can cause the Spirit to withdraw, which is why constant communion with God is so important.
- **Emotional Wounds:** Some people are like Lazarus on the day he was raised from the dead; they are bound by the grave clothes of the past and need to be gently unwrapped before they can experience God in all of God's fullness.
- **An Unyielded Spirit:** You cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit if you are full of yourself. An act of surrender is required. Some people have their lives planned out and don't want God to interrupt their agendas, but rather to decorate their lives with his blessing. This is not how

blessings of the crucified and risen Jesus. Now was the end of their waiting and the beginning of the new life in the Spirit. The arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost was the confirmation and focusing of their individual experiences of the Risen Jesus and is a pattern that is repeated throughout the centuries in believer's baptism.

Such an exploding force, consequent upon the Resurrection, would change not only their lives but the direction of the world. This power, interpreted as the Spirit of Christ, then identified as the Holy Spirit – was the same Spirit who had brooded over the waters at creation, inspired the prophets, overshadowed Mary and now, according to Jesus' promise, was exploding within the disciples – instigating a new creation.

Only this *power from on high* could fashion them into useful instruments for the preaching and healing work of the Kingdom. Only thus equipped could they be heralds of the new age. Only through the power of the Spirit did an esoteric Jewish sect spread over the face of the earth.

The power of the Holy Spirit is always given to further God's purpose for his creation. The task of the Church is to be expectant and obedient so that it may be ready to be a channel of that power and so further the Kingdom of God.

If we may, let's return to the question '*What does it mean?*' What does the Holy Spirit mean for us?

their own languages being spoken by *Galileans* (i.e. people from an insignificant outpost of the Roman Empire). How would they know the languages of the civilised world? The listeners are amazed and perplexed. Of course! This is exactly the right response to the presence of the Holy Spirit, then and now. 'What does this mean?' they ask. Hold on to this question.

The phenomenon also meets with predictable scepticism; it's the drink what done this... There will always be a way for the determined to diminish the action of God in their minds; there is always a way for the sceptic to quench the work of the Spirit and rationalise its power.

Peter gets up to speak. Peter – the man who denied Christ three times. This emotional hot-head who doesn't really *get-it* in the Gospel stories is now spokesman for the Church; eloquent, proclaiming the fulfilment of the prophet Joel. The Spirit will be poured out on all flesh; the reversal of Babel. The Spirit will bond believers together by a common love and language – the very love and language of the Godhead. There will be no more alienation from God for '*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*'

What a momentous time it has been for the disciples. Because they had witnessed the post-resurrection appearances they knew they were living at the dawn of a new age. The disciples receive both a personal revelation and a group experience, which in turn lead to a release of their personalities and latent gifts, together with a receiving of others, which they knew had to be used in Christ's mission to the world. They had been obedient and waited for the

Acts 2: 1-21

Pentecost

To pick up on the Methodist theme of last week - I was baptised as a child and not much happened. Much later I received baptism in the Holy Spirit in a charismatic Methodist Church and everything happened. It's not the denomination that matters but the people of faith in a certain time and place.

The disciples are in a certain place at a particular time; Pentecost – the Feast of Weeks – annually celebrated 50 days after the Passover. Jews from every nation are in Jerusalem to enjoy the festival. The disciples are 'all together in one place' unified, expectant, waiting for the promise. Unity is important. The Spirit honours their sense of obedience and common purpose and turns up. But this is turning up on the Spirit's own terms. There is no polite knock on the door, of a gentle breeze to arouse the senses; the Spirit is untamed and untameable, bursting into the house like a violent wind, blowing where it wills, filling every nook and cranny – an all-enveloping presence. When the Spirit turns up in our lives it is rarely on our terms or politely. It can tear through who we are, shaping us into something more aligned to our God-given identity.

What looks like tongues of fire come to rest on each of the disciples. Fire – the biblical sign of God's holiness, power and presence, the cleansing, testing refiner's fire rests on each one. The touch is personal. All speak in tongues, not just any old tongues but actual languages. The Jews who are curious to understand the din recognise