

Today is Pentecost Sunday. This is the day on which we celebrate the birthday of the Christian Church. What better day then to welcome by baptism, three new members of the church of God, the Body of Christ, here in Ingatestone! The reading from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells us of all the amazing things that happened on that first Day of Pentecost, when the words of the prophet Joel, and also Jesus' own words that we heard in the Gospel reading, were fulfilled. In the reading from Acts chapter 2, I hope you picked up feelings of excitement, yet also of astonishment, and maybe a little fear - something that was actually quite overwhelming, happening both on a personal, intimate level, but also a feeling that this day would change the world! Our reading ended just as Peter was really getting going with what could arguably be called the greatest sermon in history (well, that's my opinion anyway!). Don't forget that Peter was that disciple who had been so terrified, who had run away when Jesus needed him most and had denied even knowing Jesus three times - if nothing else can convince you of the power of Jesus' resurrection and of the Holy Spirit may I encourage you to reflect on the change that came over Peter, enabling him to speak out in this way 'telling it as it is' to use a colloquial phrase. Speaking to all those present on that day in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit first came in such a powerful way, Peter was given the courage to speak out to those who had crucified Jesus - verses 23 and 24 read 'this Jesus, whom *you* crucified...*God* has raised from the dead'. If we were able to read on in that chapter, we would see that three thousand persons received Peter's message and were baptised that day! What ever would *we* do if 3,000 people came to know Jesus as their Saviour in one day, and came to join us here in worshipping Him and wanted to be baptised? Yes, that sharp intake of breath says it all - it would be at once both amazing, exciting, and not a little terrifying! These perhaps are some of

the emotions that the disciples must have felt on that day in Jerusalem!

I guess if we are really honest, we don't always think or speak all that much about the Holy Spirit in our church today. Yet we ignore Him at our peril. It is hard for people to understand when we baptise someone, as we have today, to understand why we baptise 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. We all I think have a fairly good conception of who the Father is - not a bearded gentleman sitting somewhere up in the sky, but the Almighty, who made the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. We know that Jesus as the One who came to earth, who left all the glory of heaven behind and took upon Himself the form of a man in order that we might know just what God is like - all loving, and perfectly good, the only person who has never done anything wrong and yet the One who took all our sins on His shoulders when He died on the cruel cross. Yet - just who is the Holy Spirit? If we return to the Gospel reading we see that Jesus obviously knows Him well. Because of the limitations of the physical body in which Jesus was present on earth, He knew that He could not remain on earth for ever, and just ten days ago we celebrated His ascension into heaven, and He now reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords at His Father's right hand. Jesus told the disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them, and this is still His promise to us, in 21st century Ingatestone. The Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, and in the words of the Nicene creed which is in the one used in the prayer Book version of Holy Communion, 'with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified'. It is the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts and causes us to recognise that Jesus *is* Lord, and that He died for us. Then Holy Spirit lives in our hearts so that we might know the truth about God, and so that we might be able to live our lives in the way that pleases the

Father. Supremely, He brings us comfort and power - power to be able to talk to other people about our faith, power to do the right thing when the going gets tough, power to work for Him. He sets our hearts on fire with love for God, convicts us when we have fallen into sin, and enables us to receive forgiveness. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that brought about such a change in Peter's life, and if we let Him, will bring about a change in our own lives.

There are about as many views of the Holy Spirit as there are of, for example, which is the *right* way to worship. Some churches are more 'charismatic' than others - if you were at the Ingatestone and Fryerning Churches together meeting last week, you would have heard Pastor Ian Moore describing the importance that they give to the Holy Spirit, and particularly to the gifts of healing and speaking in tongues that characterises their worship. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to all of us, but not everyone will receive *all* His gifts. Most importantly, His working within us enables us to grow in the 'fruits' of the Spirit. These are listed in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians where we read - 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'. As we grow to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ more, so his Holy Spirit is at work within each one of us, encouraging these fruits, helping us to grow more like Christ and enabling us to have a deeper relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.