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Last Sunday we said farewell to an old and tired friend, a building which stood us in good stead for 50 years last October. Narola and I have been here for 18 years and we too felt a tinge of sadness, as one would, leaving a house which was home for many years.

Here we are in this temporary place. On Friday the Site Engineer said, *You are here for only 18 months; we have instructions to move you before Christmas 2019, because this building comes down in January 2020!*

Last Sunday, celebrating Pentecost alongside our final service in the old building, I felt we did not do justice to what is essentially the birthday of the Church.

Among Christians, Pentecost has lost its significance. When collating the 66 books of the Bible, our forefathers in faith felt it important that the four biographies (Gospel narratives) of the life of Christ, should be followed by the biography of the Church. After all, the Church, we the people, are the Body of Christ.

Think of the love and care God has for us, that we should be protected and kept for eternity with Him in His Kingdom, that after the Ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to be our constant companion. Who then is the Holy Spirit and what is its significance.

The first thing we must learn to accept is that the Holy Spirit (*also The Spirit, or The Spirit of God*) **is a person**. The Holy Spirit is not long slivers of white smoke wafting around a room, nor is it a spooky creature travelling through solid walls and closed doors, to frighten people.

How then, do we know the Holy Spirit is a person? The Bible talks about a person as a living being, who can do personal things in relationship, such as speaking, thinking, feeling, acting (doing). Anyone who does these interactive things in relationship (e.g. God, the angels, and human beings) is a person. So, let's apply this criteria to the Holy Spirit.

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First thing we learn is, **the Spirit speaks**. The first time we read this in the Book of Acts about an incident in the life of the Apostle Philip. An angel tells him to go down the Gaza road. Once there, *"the Spirit **said** to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.'*¹ Philip obeyed, found a high official from the court of the Ethiopian king reading the Scriptures, and Philip explained to him, the meaning of what he was reading. This is how the Gospel travelled to the land of on the horn of Africa.

Then we of read the incident when the disciples were gathered in the town of Antioch and *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit **said**, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"*² The Holy Spirit speaks His agenda of work for Barnabas and Saul!

The **second** thing we learn about the person of the Holy Spirit, is that the **Spirit teaches and reminds** us (causes us to recall). Before His ascension, Jesus told the disciples, *"the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will **teach** you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."*³ Paul taught this principle to the Church at Corinth, *"We do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words taught to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's own words to interpret and explain spiritual truths to those who are spiritual people, i.e. those who are living by the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit."*⁴

There are several other features which makes the Holy Spirit a person: **the Spirit takes decisions**; He has a mind, to help us and intercede for us, and the Spirit can forbid or prevent human speech and plans⁵

¹ Acts 8:29

² Acts 13:2

³ John 14:26

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:13

⁵ Acts 16:6-7

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The Holy Spirit also **has emotions**. He can be grieved⁶ and He can be outraged⁷.

Putting together all these attributes, we get a fuller and more convincing picture of a **person** on a critical mission.

The **third** thing we learn about the Holy Spirit is that He did not suddenly appear after the Ascension of Jesus. In the Creation account we read, *God created the Heavens and Earth, all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.*⁸ The word **brood** here does not refer to a mood of worry and fretting; it describes a bird *incubating*, watching and waiting for the first signs of birth. Right from the start, when God set about creating the heavens and the earth, the Holy Spirit was actively involved, watching over the dark void that was the earth, waiting for God to initiate signs of life.

The Holy Spirit has been active throughout the history of the Old Testament, speaking, guiding, directing, forbidding, prompting and encouraging people to speak.

In the last book of the Old Testament written by the prophet Malachi, he reminds his readers of the sacredness of marriage saying, *God, not you, made marriage. His Spirit inhabits even the smallest details of marriage*⁹. The prophet Malachi is preparing the human race, 430 years in advance, that the soon to be Church, which is all people gathered in the Name of Jesus and identified as His followers, is as sacred to God as marriage, that the fidelity a man and a woman promise in marriage, is as sacred as God's

⁶ Acts 15:28; Ephesians 4:30

⁷ Hebrews 10:29, Acts 5:3, 4

⁸ Genesis 1:2 (The Message)

⁹ Malachi 2:15

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uncompromising fidelity towards all His creation, and as sacred as Jesus' love towards His soon to come, His Church.

So far we have discovered **first**, the Holy Spirit is a person who does everything you would expect a person to do: to listen, to speak, to feel emotions, to take decisions. **Second**, the Holy Spirit existed well before Creation, and the creation account gives us a glimpse of His role as protector, keeper, guardian, preserver of God's acts of creation. The image of The Holy Spirit **brooding** over us as a *caretaker-custodian* helps us appreciate His role in our lives, to guide us, counsel us with God's wisdom, help us speak God's Truth, to keep us safe, all for the purpose of leading us into God's eternal kingdom.

The **fourth** and final thing we shall examine today, is that the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father.

Let's go back to the 3rd chapter in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus' second cousin John was busy preparing people for the arrival of Jesus, by baptising them with water saying, *"I'm baptising you here in the river, turning in your old life, for a life fit for purpose in God's kingdom. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama of life—compared to him I'm a mere stagehand—will ignite the life of God's kingdom within you, a fire will burn within you, as the Holy Spirit works on making you fit for God's kingdom, from the inside out. He's going to clean and reorder your house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."*¹⁰

As we begin to explore "baptism", we discover that it is a two step process: first is the cleansing by water, which washes the "barnacles" on the outside of our lives, things we pick up in the journey of life which have stuck to us and form part of our external identity. The second step in the process of baptism is to change the inside of our lives, our attitudes, our

¹⁰ Matthew 3:11-12

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thoughts, our ideas, our plans and even our speech, how we talk with each other, about each other and to each other (!), and bring these in line with God's life in us, and this is the work the Holy Spirit.

We shall continue to explore Baptism in the weeks ahead, but at this time, we are exploring the first building block of the Church which is the Holy Spirit, who is the promise of the Father. Not once, but several times, Jesus emphasised, it would be the Father who would send the Spirit.

- I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another Advocate, who will never leave you.**¹¹
- When the Father sends the Advocate as My representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will **teach** you everything and will **remind** you of everything I have told you.¹²
- I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of Truth. He will come to you from the Father and will **testify all about me.**¹³

The clearest indication Jesus gave about the Holy Spirit was this:

- *"At that time (after my ascension and when the Holy Spirit is released to you), you won't need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name. You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy. The Father Himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God. Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father."*¹⁴

¹¹ John 14:16

¹² John 14:26

¹³ John 15:26

¹⁴ John 16:23-28 (NLT)

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Jesus left the sinless purity of Heaven to live among us, in a world infused and encrusted with sin, to be exposed to it with every possibility of being tainted by it, but He remained sinless and pure. So it is in the plan of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we the body of Christ, should remain pure until the day Jesus takes us into the presence of God.

We are not asked to be **perfect** by doing the "right" things, saying the "right" words, befriending the "right" people.

We are expected to remain **pure** in thought word and deed, and we can do it because we have the resource we need, the person of the Holy Spirit to counsel us, guide us and direct us.

AMEN