

**Pentecost, 23 May 2021**

*St Francis, Friar Park, Confirmation Masses*



*Pentecost by Duccio*

## **Gospel**

*St John 15.26-27, 16.12-15*

Jesus said to his disciples, 'But when the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *the Spirit of truth*, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the *Spirit of truth* comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

## **Homily**

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". It is a line we all know, instinctively almost from hundreds of courtroom dramas, and even perhaps from our own experience. It has been rattling around our court system since about the 13th century. But "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" is also the message of this day, a day of great rejoicing for all Christians as we celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit whom Christ has sent on His Church as He promised.

When Jesus talked of His departure from the disciples – first because His death, and then because of His ascension into heaven – He spoke of being with them in a **new way**. He would, He said, have a **new body**. And indeed after His resurrection and after His ascension He **was**, each time, with them in a new and a different way. His mysteriously free resurrection body after His death, was the pledge of even greater power and freedom of the Body of His Spirit after He ascended to the Father. To be part of it you would have to be **born into it**. No disciple, not a single one of us, is *born* Christian, even if we're born into a Christian family: we, every one of us, become Christian, by a second birth, we become Christian. We are born through the waters of baptism, and Christ enters us by His Spirit in confirmation and communion. This new body of His, Jesus said, would not be visible to the world until after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. And from that moment, says Jesus, "*The Spirit will be my witness. And you too will be my witnesses*" (John 15:26). Just as the Holy Spirit was Jesus's 'inseparable companion' (Basil of Caesarea) He is the inseparable companion of every Christian. This is the decisive thing about the Holy Spirit.

That is why Jesus calls the Spirit a *para-kletos*, an along-sider, a companion, to help us to give our witness and to advocate our cause. That is the idea that lies behind the word (one which is rather strange to our ears). To return to the courtroom, if you are giving your testimony before a court, even more so if you are sure of your innocence, you want the *truth* to come out; and for that you need a counsellor, someone who is at your side to speak up for you – to plead – on your behalf before the court.

But there is more: because this ‘along-sider’ would not be as Jesus was in the days of His physical life, a distinct person limited by the physical boundaries of His own body, even His resurrection body. Now, when the Spirit is given, He is given to dwell in us. His presence is not attached to us, from the outside. **The Spirit dwells and grows from the inside of a person**, like a living embryo grows and develops in the heart and the womb of a mother.

2

If we want to understand all that is said of the Holy Spirit, there is no more effective way than to read, one after another, all the statements that are made by St John about the Paraclete in His gospel. And one phrase in particular keeps recurring: the Spirit of Truth, the Truth-bearing Spirit. ‘I will ask the Father’, says Jesus, ‘**He will give you another Helper, the Spirit of truth**. The world *cannot* receive Him, because it can’t see Him or know Him. But you do! for He lives with you and will be in you.’ (14.17). A little later He says the Spirit of Truth is the Advocate, **the constant witness to all Jesus has said and done** (15.26). And then, just before the conclusion of our reading, explains that ‘When the *Spirit of truth* comes, **He will guide you into all the truth**’ (16:13).

Two things stand out clearly from this teaching by Jesus, which are reflected in all the authors of the New Testament: the Paraclete ‘tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’; and that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and His task is to illuminate and expand in all His followers the Truth of Christ, of His life, sacrifice and resurrection. All the various activities attributed to the Paraclete – teaching, reminding, witnessing, convincing, leading to the truth, announcing the truth – are to do with instructing and forming the new Body of the Lord. Like any teacher, His task is to build up and to give confidence, to help us understand; but not just to understand ideas and gain new abilities of witness; the Spirit teaches us to accept, to interiorize, and really to live the Truth and to advance in holiness – the Truth that is Jesus, *because* Jesus is the perfect reflection and image of *God* Himself.

3

Pentecost was not the descent of a book, but of living tongues of fire. Today is for you candidates for confirmation your own personal Pentecost. Perhaps not with the same drama as that Pentecost morning, but the same effects nonetheless. Confirmation proves how wrong are those who say that ‘the sermon on the mount is enough for them’. Through the Spirit of Truth our Lord’s teaching, as the apostles recorded it in the Gospels, was implemented, amplified, and revealed in its deepest meaning in His Church. But the *whole* truth about Christ, the Truth we are called to live out and be witnesses of, is not available as written records. It is written in our bodies, our words, our relationships, our actions and our sacrifices. Of course we know Christ by reading the Gospels, but we see the deeper meaning of His words and actions, and we know Christ more completely, when we have His Spirit. It is only through the Spirit that we know He is the divine Son of God and Redeemer of humanity, and only in our flesh and blood that others can see and believe it is true.

Many people in our day believe that truth has only a personal and individual meaning—your truth and my truth; many truths, contradictory truths competing for attention, creating division; truths favoured by romantics, idealogues and even dictators. Dear friends, so very much more might be said. But we Christians must live according to the Spirit of unity and truth, and this is why we must pray for the Spirit to enlighten and guide us to *overcome* the temptation to follow our own truths, and to welcome the truth of Christ transmitted in the Church. The secret of a truly vibrant Christianity, which has no reason to fear the present, the future, the ideas or obsessions of the age, or its own weaknesses or sins, is one that returns continually to the source—to Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Truth He pours into our hearts.