

## Love, obedience & service, in the power of the Holy Spirit

I was never good at languages, and the only one language we studied for the CSE thickies was French. And I'm proud of saying that I got Grade Five CSE French. That was the lowest pass mark in the worst exam possible, if you remember CSEs. It wasn't a gift of mine to learn languages. And so, when I was reading the Acts of the Apostles, I was a bit annoyed that all that they had to do was wait for the Holy Spirit, and they spoke in every language under the sun. [laughter] So, maybe that's what we should do, rather than go to school, I don't know.

But the Acts of the Apostles has the theme really, that it's a reversal of the Tower of Babel. Don't know whether you remember your Genesis stories. They're great ancient stories. The Tower of Babel, of course, was all about how people tried to become like God, and built a tower to reach heaven, and it collapsed and scattered all the peoples who ended up speaking different languages and humanity was divided.

And the author of the Acts of the Apostles is saying,  
"The gift of the Spirit brings back these disparate threads and unites people in one faith."  
So that's one view of the Spirit. In St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, I'm glad to say that St. Paul believed we should be under the influence regularly of the Spirit, in this case. Nobody can say,  
"Jesus is Lord,"  
unless he's under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

And so, Paul locates the Spirit, very much in the confession of faith, that those who can profess that, as a belief from their hearts, have the Spirit. And it manifests itself in the Body of Christ. The same Spirit that was given to us in gifts is all for service. But St. Paul had a lot to say about the Spirit. Elsewhere, in Galatians, he puts it very much in the location of the type of life we lead, and the power to lead the good life. So, he says, "Self-indulgence", in Galatians, "Is a sign of the opposite of having the Spirit." And he gives a big list: Fornication, gross indecency, sexual irresponsibility, idolatry, sorcery, feuds, wrangling, jealousy, bad temper, quarrels, disagreements, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and so on. It's quite a list, isn't it? Basically as well, that list is about disintegration, isn't it? People who indulge in these in extreme, they've got usually disintegrating personalities. But his list of what the Spirit brings, which funny enough is a bit shorter, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, truthfulness, gentleness and self-control. Now, all of us would see those as great things in themselves. But St. Paul was a good psychologist before psychology was invented, and he knows that these are integrating gifts. This is what makes a person whole and complete.

Elsewhere, in his Letter to the Romans, he says,

"The fight in us all is always between the unspiritual and the spiritual."

And he says,

"It's the difference between life and death. The Spirit is life-giving, the unspiritual, the negative, is death-dealing."

And in a sense, he's alluding back to Moses. He's saying,

"This is the new gift of God that's much clearer."

Because when Moses gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, he says,

"Look, I offer you today life or death. Follow these, and the teaching of the Lord, and you will have life. Go your own way and you will find death."

St. Paul says,

"We can experience that life giving power of God through His Spirit."

John's gospel, of course, centres on giving us the truth; the gift of truth. And other than just the Gospel that we have today, the whole speech of Jesus in that upper room about the Spirit, had some very interesting phrases. Because John locates the Spirit in the mission of the Church. As you know elsewhere, he says... He appeared after the resurrection and said,

"Peace be with you."

Now, when Jesus did that, He wasn't just making a friendly statement after His resurrection about wishing people well, and it's what our sign of peace is truly based on. It's the shalom. It really is a prayer.

"May God give you every good thing." That's what shalom means. It's a blessing. "May God give you every good thing."

And He said,

"He breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit." And that is very powerful and meek because John is also alluding to Genesis where it says, "When God created humanity," he said, "He breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man." And in the old rite of baptism, when it was in Latin, the priest used to do exactly the same to a child.

"As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you," Jesus said after His resurrection. And that is what the Spirit is about. The Spirit is the empowering of us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus with His message. The body of Christ is a witness to Him and it's where the Spirit is undoubtedly found. The Spirit is not restricted. God's Spirit is not restricted and we have a tangible sign that the Church is a symbol of the presence of God's Spirit with Jesus at the centre., We are all called to obedience love, and service with and through the power of the Holy Spirit.