

Homily **Pentecost** - Year C (9.6.19)

I'm not very good with languages. I was useless at school. But I'm always interested in them. And one of the things that fascinated me and hit me was that you can get a word in one language that is not translatable literally into another. In fact, in such circumstances, you often find that the other language, the receiving language, needs to use several phrases or expressions to get near to the meaning of the one word. And today, we have one of those words in the gospel: Advocate. It's actually in Greek '**parakletos**'. And the Greeks used it in distinct ways for several operations and actions. And it's no mistake why it's used for the Holy Spirit.

So the Greeks would use it as follows: A **parakletos** could be

1. a person called to be a witness in somebody's favour, in a prosecution where the penalties could be severe where that witness would be able to redeem them from a severe penalty.
2. somebody who pleads the cause of someone, makes a case for them.
3. an expert called in to give advice in a tricky situation.
4. someone who is called in, because they've got this special gift and talent to bring courage and heart to dispirited soldiers, to rouse them to action.

So you can see it needs several English phrases to say what a **parakletos** is. And you can see why the gospel chose it for the Holy Spirit. Basically it's a

lot to do with giving help in trouble or need, to strengthen. And I thought I'd use this as a basis for approaching the Holy Spirit, in the way he strengthens us, in three very important areas, using the traditional gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I think **firstly, in our relationship with Jesus and his church**, this is where the Holy Spirit is important. **Secondly, in defending the faith**. And **thirdly, in spreading the faith**. And I'd just like to remind you of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are mentioned in St. Paul, but in the Penny Catechism. Can anybody remember them?

Yes. Go on then [several suggestions from congregation]

Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, fortitude, counsel, piety and fear of the Lord. They're the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. I think you were thinking of the fruits maybe, I don't know. I don't know.

Anyway, but **first of all in our relationship with God**. You know, I think our young people have got a big problem about relationship with God. And piety and fear of the Lord are actually just the bedrock of forming a relationship with God first and foremost, which literally mean in these old-fashioned words, devotion and awe-struck at the wonder of God.

But I think young people and maybe some of us older have a problem with the relationship with God, because of heroes and idols substituting for a relationship. You know what I mean, we've all heard so far that Facebook is a

big problem for forming so called 'relationships'. But, you know, I think heroes and idols are an additional problem. I always get this name wrong, so don't laugh. So I was looking on the internet for the best-loved singer among young people today, and it's Ariana Grande.

If you remember, she appeared in the Manchester Arena. And she's a good example, because you see the kids absolutely adore her and scream when she appears – they feel connected and close to their idol. But they can't have a relationship with her. It's ridiculous, they think they have a relationship with this person, but how can they? I don't know about heroes. At the moment, I'm reading, very slowly, *The American Civil War* by Shelby Foote. And, oh gosh, Abraham Lincoln stands out in my list of heroes. His speeches are fantastic, better than Churchill sometimes. And he's just a wonderful person. But I can't have a relationship with him, can I? He's dead.

And this is the mistake that people make about relationship. But you can have a relationship with the living Lord Jesus and his church, the body of Christ. And the Holy Spirit we need to invoke to really, through prayer and through substantial understanding, come to a knowledge of Jesus and his presence in my life, and indeed relationship with one another by association. Very important for the faith to prosper.

And then **the second** one might sound odd, **defending the faith**. You know, Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world, in the last century and into this. I was reading somewhere recently that four of Mother Teresa

of Calcutta's nuns were murdered in the Yemen nursing the sick, because they were Christian. And I actually think it won't be too long where we will have to face that level of persecution in this country.

And that's where fortitude and counsel come in, because fortitude is, of course, courage. And counsel is right judgement, knowing the right from the wrong, and taking the narrow path. And that, you need, you need those gifts if you are to defend your faith. And when I'm mentioning gifts, the spirit gives the gifts as seeds. But, we have to work at them. And we have to seek them out and develop them as powerful virtues of faith.

And that's where I think I can express that best when we talk about **the third** one, **spreading the faith**, because everybody here who was baptised and confirmed is a potential missionary. You know, people often say to me when I talk about giving witness, they say,

"Well, you know, I'm no special light. I'm just a little flicker."

And I say,

"Well, if you bring a lot of flickers into a room, it makes a big flicker."

You know? So we can witness by association through groups, even if we can't do it alone. But I think the real gifts of the Holy Spirit for spreading of the faith are wisdom, knowledge and understanding. And these have to be worked at, like all the other things.

Now, I'll illustrate what I mean, because you can ignore this. Take for example if you saw a car mechanic advertising his garage. And he said,

"Passed all my exams 20 years ago. Don't need to know another thing. Bring your car here."

Would you trust that mechanic? Or a brain surgeon who said,

"I passed my speciality exams. I'm not reading anything else. I know it all now."

Would you let him operate on your brain? No. And that's the best example I can give.

The trouble is with confirmation and the end of schooling, we tend to give up. We stop learning about the faith. We don't develop it as an adult. We don't read. We don't study. We don't examine the teachings of the church. And yet we wouldn't accept that from any other person in the street who was offering us service.

So wisdom, knowledge and understanding are no different. We need to know the teaching of Christ. We need to have an interpreter. We need to read commentaries. We need to look at our faith and what it's teaching if we are to spread the faith with confidence, because we need to be able to speak about it when asked.

And so the Holy Spirit on this day does indeed give us his gifts. But we have our work to do in responding to them.