

‘Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, O Lord and they shall be created and you shall renew the face of the Earth’

This prayer is one that is very dear to my heart. It reminds me of my personal experience and how I understand that being a Christian is to live a life in God guided by the Holy Spirit. I’ll tell you more about that another day. For now however I’d like to explore with you why I think it contains some really important encouragement and guidance for the Church, perhaps especially at this time.

We have just celebrated the feast of Pentecost when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit coming following Jesus’s Ascension. That Spirit is called different things - the Comforter, the Advocate, the Guide. The Holy Spirit is the one who will give the Church and individual Christians words, pictures, guidance from God that we need in the circumstances that we find ourselves, whatever that may be. Our responsibility is to call upon the Holy Spirit and expect God to act as the Spirit breathes renewing life into ourselves, the Church and the World.

In the current times perhaps it is most importantly a great reminder to us that the prayer that I have quoted is given to the Church as encouragement. We are asked to call for the Spirit to come upon us to aid us, to guide us but to fill our hearts with that knowledge of the joy and the hope of the good news of Jesus Christ. I don’t know about you but there have been plenty of times recently when it’s been so important to me that I have known that it’s something that I am able to do to call upon God to fill my heart with the Spirit. God does renew, redeem and restore. This is not just concept, but spiritual reality.

This should bring the enlivening and encouragement that we need in times of uncertainty and as we approach a further time of the unknown. The Holy Spirit is given to the faithful as the prayer points out – it is the gift to the baptised to equip us in our individual lives as Christians as we witness to the truth of Jesus Christ and the Universal Church to unite us and draw us together in those things which we hold in common.

Just as it did for the early church for the disciples at the first Christian Pentecost The Holy Spirit we are promised sets us free to be ablaze with God’s love just as the early church was said to be set on fire with a love for God - that beautiful image of a life lived in the fulness of God’s love. That’s an important message of encouragement, comfort and hope at this particular time and should inspire us in our vision for the church into the future.

And of course the prayer doesn’t end there - it talks about the Spirit being sent to renew the face of the earth. A reminder that this promise is for the whole of God’s creation. Too often we can forget that all that we are and all that we have comes from the God who provides. And so just as we say in our diocese, we want our churches to be healthy in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we wish communities to be transformed in the power of that Spirit.

For this is not just a message for the few. Yes, the Holy Spirit has been given in a special way to the church to renew and transform us as we are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. But that good news is also of a Holy Spirit who is given to transform the communities in which we live and change lives and guide people to a deeper knowledge of God.

So that is why that prayer is such an encouragement for me. It is a prayer of life it is a prayer of hope it is a prayer of faith. But it is also a prayer which brings promise to the whole of creation. I’d like to encourage you for it to be a prayer which regularly comes to your lips that as you are called to live your life as one has been anointed by the spirit (a Christian in other words ) that you ask for God’s spirit to equip to renew and to comfort you into the future. By that same spirit pray for the whole of

creation that it should know the transforming love of God which renews all things. So I hope you feel that that prayer will come to your lips if not daily then regularly and I hope you'll join with me now in praying it as we say ...

'Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, O Lord and renew the face of the earth.' Amen

And to conclude a wonderful reminder from St Paul's Scotforth that calling on the Holy Spirit is a prayer of the Universal Church.