

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit come – as believers in the old days were struck by awe upon your outpour and effusion, help us likewise welcome your coming to us so that we will be empowered as well as informed to live out our love for one another as bidden by Christ’s command for us. Amen.

In my Pentecost penning (as usual, it’s included insert to the bulletin today) this year, I referred to today’s Gospel Reading where Jesus said, ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you . . . if you love me. . . the Father . . . will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth . . . he abides with you and he will be in you.’

Whilst I’m not going to repeat or go further into the contents of my short write-up, it’s no mere co-incidence that on this Day of Pentecost we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Sometimes we can easily get hung up with what we read from the First Reading on the signs and wonders in heaven and on earth (the loud wind and fire appearing as tongues of fire resting on those gathering on that 50th day after Jesus’ resurrection as they took Jesus’ instructions to them seriously, to prayerfully ‘wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them’). Yet the horizon opens up for us if we dare to look beyond their waiting as sheer observing Jesus’ instructions to them. For what came to their mind might well be what Jesus had indicated to be in association with the coming of the Spirit – ranging from ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’, to ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’, to what I alluded to a few minutes ago when Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of truth . . . he abides with you and he will be in you.’

That’s right. In a way, our attention for the day of Pentecost often focuses, and stays focused, on what happened on the Day of Pentecost, even including that magnificent outcome on 3,000 people being converted after hearing Peter’s sermon which started with explanation of what happened with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ. That is natural and there’s nothing wrong with it. However, the problem with focussing merely on the signs and wonder, and the miraculous happenings on Pentecost is that it can easily lead us to treat Pentecost as something that has nothing to do with us here after 2,000 years and in Canada, thousands of miles away from Jerusalem. Of course, cognitively speaking, we know this is not true, but our human inclination tends to go by feeling instilled by

our ability or inability to associate with the Pentecostal event, even to the neglect of what our head-knowledge tells us, not to mention the truth which we purport to pursue.

In the scenario, perhaps such lopsided approach of ours to Pentecost can be amended by establishing closer affinity to the Holy Spirit as ‘Spirit of the truth’. Whilst the prevailing world-view outside the church places focus on topics such as efficiency, success or achievement, we would like to have such foci (together with other valuable foci) built on the healthy, strong foundation of truth, instead of flimsy foundation of fake falsity, or for that matter, no foundation at all, simply moving about on the philosophy that ‘everything is workable’ or ‘who cares’.

This is like a question from some teenagers coming to help with weeding on a Friday afternoon. They asked: ‘Why do we have to pull out the weeds – their flowers are beautiful too!’ To be fair to them, at least they raised this question after their work on dandelions a few weeks before. For they knew well that if the dandelions were not weeded in time, once their yellow flowers got turned into those fluffy white balls, discharging seeds in all directions, weeding the following year would involve horrendous work as a lot of the seeds flying around eventually settled down on the lawns, giving rise to numerous dandelion plants the following year. Anyway, they raised the question this time because some of the flowers of the weeds actually were starting to occupy the space in the midst of the spring flowers planted in the church front garden, so that they had to be more careful in weeding so as not to hurt the garden plants or pull out the garden flowers. So they’re hoping that perhaps we should consider letting the garden flowers and weeds co-exist. Well, I too appreciate that both weeds and garden flowers are part of God’s creation. However, as I pointed out to them, the problem with letting the weeds stay on is that weeds are real experts in consuming large amount of nutrients in the ground and growing ultra-fast so that in a blink of an eye, they would suffocate the garden flowers by, not only taking up all the nutrients and leave nothing for the garden flowers, but will also out-grow the garden flowers, blocking sunlight to those ‘ground-filler’ garden flowers. It doesn’t take long for the garden to be turned from product of years of hard-work into a haven of weeds.

In other words, our work, priorities and principles in life need to be guided by facts of truth, and not by arbitrary decisions depending on our preference for convenience or momentary likes and dislikes, or even worse, by intentional choices growing from pursuit of self-interests without counting costs to others. Sadly we see such trends subtly surfacing from time to time – whether manifesting as fake news in the cyber-world, or people occupying positions of trust choose to tell lies

or compromise their credentials as they do not put their minds to love of their neighbours.

This is nothing new though, as we recall that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus: ‘what is truth?’ when Jesus told him that ‘he came into the world to testify to the truth’. Without grasping or rather, bothering to grasp, what is truth. Pilate opted to pursue his self-interest (of keeping his career) to ignore signals from his conscience (e.g. the fear he felt when he heard the Jews telling him that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God’) and not to heed his wife’s warning him to have nothing to do with Jesus as an innocent man. There, Pilate ended up with having innocent Holy One shed his blood and died on the cross.

We surely won’t want to walk in the foot-steps of Pontius Pilate, while we also know that there’re lots of our contemporary peers seeking to tread that path, ending with the chaotic world we see a lot nowadays. How fresh a blessing it is, for us to have the Spirit of truth abiding with us and be in us as long as we are willing. The Spirit of truth empowers us as well as informs us, of the divine revelation of all truth, as Christ had taught his disciples, so that we know and live out who we are in the presence of God. A concrete demonstration of the outcome from the Spirit’s empowering us to know God and love God is what we heard from our Gospel Reading today of an unimaginable promise from Jesus: ‘Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.’

As we heard it, we may think: ‘what a big blank cheque has Jesus issued to us! How can it be true?’ Well, it is true when we invoke the guidance and protection by the Holy Spirit, letting us see and understand clearly Christ’s person and mission, and empowering us to align our desires with Christ’s desire so that we can pray truly in Jesus’ name – the kind of prayer that will be answered, as it accords with Jesus’ own nature and purpose. As we think about this, isn’t it at least as awesome as the loud wind, the fire, the speaking in tongues, Peter’s speech, and the rapid birth and growth of the church by adding 3000 to the existing 12 or 120? And what’s important is that we can relate to it in our daily life, making our prayer ‘thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven’ an easily attainable reality. Won’t we hold dearly to what the Spirit is offering us day in and day out?

And talking about prayer, we also notice from our Second Reading today, that the Holy Spirit acting on Christ’ gifts to us of ‘new life and restoration of our filial

relationship to God (in contrast to legalistic relationship of slavery)', thereby enabling us to pray to God intimately calling God 'Abba Father'. Once we got our souls roused or revived to such reality upon the Holy Spirit's rousing our spirit from numbness toward our lively divine-human relationship, we'll stay away from the pitfall of not paying due attention to the Spirit's downpour upon us.

Isn't it exactly right that the 'Spirit of truth' rouses us from slumbering to re-pick up of Christ's gift to us of restoration to new life as children of God? Once we heed the Spirit's falling afresh on us, our eyes will gradually be opened to have deeper understanding of the truth that has been revealed to us by Christ: by his teaching, by the signs and wonders performed by him, by his life incarnate, but most of all, by his death and resurrection. Then like the disciples on the Day of Pentecost 2,000 years ago, we'll find that our lives won't be the same. We'll realise that in the midst of the Holy Spirit's guidance, empowerment and protection, we'll also experience the Spirit pruning us to make us play better roles as children of God, moving in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is as depicted in the lyrics of the short hymn 'Spirit of the Living God': 'break me, melt me, mold me, fill me' – so that our lives can be fruit-bearing, bearing fruits of the Spirit to live out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, thereby building a healthy, strong foundation of truth in life. We'll find such journey of sanctification filled with surprise, as the Spirit turns us up-side down again and again, perhaps hard to take at the moment, but always grateful from hind-sight, as we got sanctified more and more towards purity in heart, faithfulness in response to God's call and wisdom in discerning God's will, so as to tread that path without straying sideways, any time throughout the entire journey. And such intriguing journey of ours towards God is nothing shy of the Spirit's manifestation through fire, wind, signs, wonders, speaking of tongues and the conversion of 3,000 on that first Day of Pentecost we commemorate today.

Let us pray again:           Come, Holy Spirit come – as believers in the old days were struck by awe upon your outpour and effusion, help us likewise welcome your coming to us so that we will be empowered as well as informed to live out our love for one another as bidden by Christ's command for us. Amen.