

If you ever watch film series such as the Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter or even the Marvel Universe, you will be used to the fact that in each part new characters are introduced to us who would have a significant impact upon the eventual outcome. Gollum only really makes an appearance in the second Lord of the Rings film, for example, and Bellatrix Lestrange only appears in the fifth of the Harry Potter films.

It can often seem that the Bible is similar with its treatment of God. One can almost break it up into three sections. In the first part; the Old Testament, we meet a God (whom we subsequently learn to be God the Father) who is the central character in the series of events we read there. In the second part; the Gospels, we read of the events of God the Son: his birth, death, resurrection and ascension, and how this has freed us from the tyranny of sin. Finally, we have the third part; the Acts of the Apostles and the subsequent letters and books, in which a newcomer; the Holy Spirit makes His mark and founds the Church.

It can seem as if the Holy Spirit has been hanging around for a long time waiting for His moment to perform His work on the earth. Even worse, it can seem as if the Holy Spirit didn't exist until the day of Pentecost. And yet, the Holy Spirit is *central* to the entire life of the people of God, both now and even before Adam was a lad. Pentecost was not the birth of the Holy Spirit, for God is *eternally* Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit but if you read it, you will see that it refers to earlier instances of the work of the Holy Spirit. We are told that the Spirit spoke through the mouth of David the king of Israel, the spirit spoke through Isaiah, and Stephen accuses the Jews that they had opposed the Spirit throughout their lives. The Spirit has been present throughout history, but something special happened at Pentecost.

So what is Pentecost?

The Jewish faith had three great festivals which most Jewish males were expected to attend. There was the feast of Passover (commemorating Moses leading Israel from slavery in Egypt), the feast of Tabernacles (when Jews were supposed to perform a pilgrimage to the Temple) and the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was also called the feast of the weeks, because it came fifty days, or a week of weeks, after the Passover.

As such, it was a major festival and thus was expected to be observed in Jerusalem by anyone nearby. NO wonder there were so many nations present when Peter and the disciples appeared speaking in other languages. "Parthians and Medes, Elamites..." and so on. They would have been present because it was natural for people of many nations to be there at that time of year.

But it also had a historical significance because it celebrated the giving of the law; that time when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the ten commandments given by the Lord. Furthermore, there was an agricultural significance because it came as the crop was coming to fruition and it was a holiday for everyone - slave or free. Therefore it appealed to everyone in that city, no matter what their social standing.

Apart from anything else, it was the moment that the Holy Spirit became the dominant force in the Church. The Acts of the Apostles is festooned with examples of the Spirit at work in the world. Not only was the Spirit the inspiration of the early Church but it was the source of the day to day courage and power of the Church. The Spirit gives power, but not as the world expects. The Spirit is there to help us to do the will of God. And the whole of this event was not what the world expected.

The problem was that people had not expected the Spirit because they had not realised that the Spirit had been in action throughout history. In the book, Genesis, we read that on the first day of creation the Spirit “moved over the waters”. The Spirit was not a new phenomenon; what was new was the direct effect it could have on people and we can see that direct effect in the actions of the Apostles. Suddenly they are filled with power from on high and speak in tongues. These are reminiscent of the later teachings of Paul who, in his letter to the Corinthians, outlines the gifts that are as a result of the Spirit acting in a person: preaching, teaching, prophecy to name but three.

Peter, through his preaching demonstrated that Jesus was the Christ and had been put to death by the direct intervention of the Jews. Peter was vehement in his accusations, but we ought to realise that such accusations are addressed at us also for we crucified Jesus as surely as the Romans at the behest of the Jews. Jesus didn't just die for their sins; he died for *our* sins as well.

Pentecost was a feast of the Jews. Pentecost became one of the most significant feasts in the Church because it gave power to man to form the Church. Remember that the apostles were a group of frightened men. They were meeting in secret in an upper room. And then something happened, something we can never understand. Luke, who wrote down the Acts of the Apostles wasn't there so what we have today is not a first hand account.

But something happened, as a result of which those men who ran away from the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane were fierce in their attack on the Jewish authorities from that day onwards. These scared men (whose faults the Gospellers were always happy to record) never showed fear again.

This is the Spirit that drives the Church. It has driven everyone who has called themselves Christian since. Whether it be St Peter, St Paul or you, all have been impelled to act for the Church by the Spirit.

The Spirit influences all of us. The Spirit has been at work in the world since it's creation and is at work now. Peter and the rest of the disciples were open to the Spirit and were prepared to let it guide them. It guides all of us. We need to let it guide us too.

In the name of the Father...