Magazine June

I can’t believe I am already writing an article for the June magazine! It only seems like a few weeks ago that we were considering which services we could hold over Christmas, and as for Easter that seems to have come and gone in a flash, although we are still in the Easter season as I write this, and depending on when you receive your magazine you may well still be in the Easter season when you read this: the 7th Sunday of Easter falling on May 29th. The following Sunday is Pentecost, which is also known as Whit Sunday, a name derived from the fact that it used to be a very popular day for baptisms, and because the baptized usually wore white the name Whit (White) Sunday came about.

Pentecost is the fulfilment of Easter and the birthday of the church and by many it is deemed more important than Christmas. It’s importance has probably been lost because of everything else that goes on around this time of the year, and this year with the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations it will be even lower down the pecking order.

The name Pentecost means fiftieth in Greek, and Pentecost Sunday is the nearest Sunday to fifty days after Easter. It's origin starts way before the Holy Spirit’s coming to the Disciples in the form of a violent wind….with divided tongues of fire resting on the disciples as they met together in a secret house (a description we don’t actually find in the gospels but in the Acts of the Apostles). The Jewish people celebrated the feast of Pentecost way before Jesus’ birth as they still do today. It is a celebration of the first pickings from the harvest fields, very similar to our harvest festival we have later in the year. It is also closely linked to the Passover and is fifty days after this festival, a festival to celebrate the covenant that God had made with Moses and the people of Israel. In essence the Christian church begins with the ‘passover’ of Christ at Easter, but it is only with the coming of the Holy Spirit, probably whilst the disciples were being good Jews and celebrating the Jewish Passover feast, does it really come alive. Pentecost is the completion of Easter and is always thought of as the church’s birthday.

Many think that Jesus had to die to enable him to be resurrected so that he could come back to earth to show the disciples and the people of Israel that death was not the end, that our lives continue after our earthly life has finished. Jesus could not stay here on earth because we are promised a perfect life after death sitting with God in his Eternal Kingdom/heaven; but God couldn’t leave us to fend for ourselves so he sent the Holy Spirit to direct our lives and comfort our earthly being. The Holy Spirit is understood to be the spirit of love between the Father and the Son in the intimacy and mystery of the Holy Trinity. It was the giving of that same spirit of love that instantly transformed fearful men into energetic preachers and missionaries.

It is the transfer of the Holy Spirit through the ages from Saint Peter to today, through the laying on of hands at the ordination of Bishops, which has caused division between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican church since the breakaway from the RC church during the reformation and the rule of Henry Eighth. The RC church believed that the lineage from Saint Peter was broken at that point and therefore do not, or thankfully more often the case nowadays is did not, recognise the laying of hands and the transfer of the Holy Spirit to those who are being baptized, confirmed and ordained, and that is why in traditional RC churches, as an Anglican or Methodist, you are unable to receive Holy Communion.

Just like with those first Disciples, twelve scared men in a locked room, may the Holy Spirit be allowed to transform your life, may you feel the love of God within you, and may that love lead you to a happier and more peace filled and joyous life. If you fully allow the Spirit into your life I’m afraid that it will also make you busier, more challenged, and ever more eager to do God’s will, but that is only a small price to pay to having God fully within and about you.

May I finish with a blessing:

May the Holy Spirit of God come upon you,

breathe new life into you,

set your hearts on fire with love,

and empower you to live and work to his glory.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

Father, Son and the Holy Spirit

be upon you now and for ever more.

Amen.

Martin, your Vicar.