REFLECTIONS ON THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

In the run up to Pentecost, or Whitsun, I am going to write a few words about each of the gifts of the Spirit which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. These are wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues and interpretation.

I will give Bible references, so you might like to have a Bible to hand.

In the Old Testament these gifts were bestowed upon some chosen individuals, but since the death and resurrection of Jesus, and as prophesied by Joel, (Joel 2 v 28) they have become available to all his followers. Every Spirit–filled believer may receive and use any gift, but some gifts seem to be more suited to some people than others. And there is a degree of overlap among the gifts. I will be as clear as I can.

The most important thing about the gifts of the Spirit is that they must be used with love.

May I suggest that on the Day of Pentecost, we each choose a gift that we would like God to give us, and ask him for it. The gifts are given for the benefit of the Christian community. It might be difficult to use some of them while we are socially distancing, but perhaps not impossible. And life won’t be like this for ever!

TONGUES

At Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able, supernaturally, to speak in different languages which the crowd of people around them, from various countries, understood. This was “speaking in tongues”.

More commonly nowadays, speaking in tongues is what is called “glossolalia”, which literally means making a sound with the tongue and is a language that only God understands.

In the Old Testament speaking in tongues referred to speaking in foreign languages. But one possible mention of glossolalia might be when Isaiah prophesied that in the future God would speak to his people “with foreign lips and strange tongues.” (Isaiah 28 v 11)

Paul said that the gift of speaking in tongues is of little value to the Christian community unless there is interpretation, but it is edifying for the speaker. (1 Corinthians 14 v 2-6)

Speaking in tongues sometimes happens for the first time on the occasion of baptism in the Holy Spirit. This gift is particularly useful in prayer because the Spirit is praying on our behalf and he knows much better than we do how to pray in line with God’s will. Speaking in tongues is entirely under our control. We just allow God to take over our speech. We can stop at any time. When we use it for private prayer, after it is over, there is a sense of release and peace.

Or it can be a way for God to speak to us. Then an interpreter is required. The intellect is not involved.

Some Christians believe that speaking in tongues was just a one-off gift, given to facilitate the early spreading of the gospel. There are two other examples of it happening in Acts, when Peter was at the house of Cornelius, (Acts 10 v 44-46), and when Paul baptised some people in Ephesus. (Acts 19 v 1-6)

Nowadays many Christians do it regularly.

PRAYER

Dear Lord

Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

May we remember that all your gifts are freely available to us, if we truly want them and if we ask you for them.

May we not dismiss any of your gifts just because they may not be part of our church culture. Please may we be open to them.

May we never belittle the power of the Spirit and the extent to which that power is available to us.

Please forgive us when we do.

Holy Spirit, please fill me now. (*At this point ask the Holy Spirit for one of the gifts if you would like to.)*

Through Jesus Christ

Amen