

Pentecost is the reality in which
we live: a gift and a vocation,
deification, and a deifying
discipline

*A sermon preached at the High Mass in the
Chapel of the Resurrection, Pusey House,
Oxford, on Sunday, 19 May 2024 (The Feast of
Pentecost), by The Reverend Dr George
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**Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the
sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Festival
of Weeks to the Lord your God. DEUTERONOMY 16:9-10**

**And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of
fire, and it sat upon each of them: and they were all
filled with the Holy Ghost. ACTS 2:3**

DEUTERONOMY 16.9-12; ACTS 2.1-11; ST JOHN 14.15-end

PENTECOST, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the
apostles and disciples in Jerusalem, is not just an
event we remember. Pentecost is the reality in which we
live. We live in this reality as those who receive a
super-abundant gift, and we live in this reality as a
vocation. I propose that we spend some time cherishing this
gift, fixing our attention on what we have been given, on
Who we have been given. God the Holy Spirit has baked us
together into one bread. God the Holy Spirit has so enlarged
our souls that we may be filled up with all the life of God.
God the Holy Spirit has made us a temple, an inner kingdom,
where we live in the over-flowing and super-abundant life
which is both our life, and the life of God: the Three
Persons of Life, and Love, and Light - God the Holy Trinity.
Let us pray that God may open our eyes to see the wondrous
things of His law, even His law inscribed in our hearts,
even His very Self come to dwell with us, to live in us.

It will probably surprise us to know that, in the early
days of the Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit was not the
fundamental focus of the day of Pentecost. Yes, that's right,
the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost was not the first
focus, not the only focus, of the day of Pentecost. To put
it another way, Pentecost was not just one day, but the 50th
day, a week of weeks, and then the summing up day of the
Festival, the 50th day, a day outside of time, and a day

containing all time. Pentecost was therefore a celebration of the whole Paschal Mystery, another third day, the whole mystery of Easter.¹ This is why the song of Alleluia has been on our lips and in our hearts in an especially fulsome way these last 50 days. Not the Spirit first, but Christ is the first focus, the first fruit, of the feast of the 50 days.² These 50 days of the Easter Feast are one long celebration, one long feast day, 'the feast of the entire Christian mystery: the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit.'³ Indeed, the descent of the Spirit makes all these mysteries present to us, because the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ come to dwell in us, making his home in us.

John Keble, the spiritual father of the Oxford Movement, describes this gift as nothing less than our deification: '[God] **became Man, that He might, in Himself deify us**'.⁴ By dwelling with us and in us, God gives a share in the life of God. How can flimsy human words begin to describe this gift? And yet God the Word has joined Himself to these fleshy and frail human words to make them luminous by His grace. The gift of Pentecost is the reality in which we live, and this reality is not only a divine gift, it is also a vocation. Keble calls this vocation a 'deifying discipline'. This deifying discipline is the discipline and programme of divine love written by the finger of God on our hearts. This discipline is the call to find Christ in all our efforts to love one another, this deifying discipline is a call away from everything that pollutes the love of God in us, and this deifying discipline is a kind of programme and the promise for the healing of our souls.

To help us to open our eyes and ears, let us go first to the feast of the Old Covenant, the Feast of Weeks, the feast of the 50th day which the first Christian Pentecost

¹ Exodus 19.11, 19.15, on Pentecost as the third day when the Law is written on the tables of the heart.

² *Easter Letters* of St. Athanasius: XXVI, 1389 C). In Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, p. 319. St Athanasius: 'The holy Sunday [Easter Sunday] extends by a continuous grace through all the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost, during which we celebrate the Paschal Feast'.

³ 'Gregory Nazianzen echoes this teaching in the Fourth Century: "Such is the Feast that you celebrate today: celebrate the birth of Him Who was born for you and weep for the death of Him Who died for you" (XXXVI, 652 D)' p 319, see 303.

⁴ John Keble, 'Pentecostal Fear, Acts ii, 23', 'And Fear Came upon every soul'. 'A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church, Cuddesdon, on Tuesday, May 24, 1864, on the Anniversary of the Theological College', (Oxford: John Henry and James Parker, 1864).

'Yes, my brethren, this and no less was the mysterious Whitsun privilege and glory of those on whom first the Holy Ghost came down: a glory so high and inconceivable, that the holy Fathers did not hesitate to call it even Deification, and Christianity, which teaches and confers it, they called "a deifying discipline." [e.g. S. Ath. Ep. ad Adolph., § 5, t. i. 914. A.: "*He became Man, that He might, in Himself deify us*;" S. Cypr. de Zelo, &c., i. 226, ed. Fell: "That in thee the Divine Birth may shine out, and the deifying discipline work answerably to thy parentage, which is of God."']'

filled up and fulfilled. We heard this described in our OT lesson from the book of Deuteronomy:

⁹ Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn.

¹⁰ And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand.⁵

The book of Leviticus specifies the character of this freewill offering as 'two loaves of bread'; 'they shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven'; these two loaves 'are the firstfruits unto the Lord' (Leviticus 23.17)⁶

Whereas on Easter Day, and during the 50-day-long celebration of Easter, we praise Christ as the passover lamb who is sacrificed for us, so on Pentecost, we see the mystery of Christ in the two loaves of bread, the first fruits. What the people of Israel did in the ritual of the Old Covenant, Christ the author of the New Covenant fulfils in himself at the beginning and end of the 50 days of Easter: 'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept' (1 Cor 15.20).⁷

⁵ Deuteronomy 16.9-12, verse 11: 'And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there.'

⁶ See Christopher Wordsworth, Bp of Lincoln, *The Holy Bible with Notes Vol 1 The Pentateuch* (www.archive.org) on Leviticus 23, p 73, with more on the images of harvest and first-fruits, esp on Lev. 23, verse 17. See Exodus 20.16 p 283 for a brief summary of Pentecost, and, much fuller, Wordsworth on Exodus 19.11, on the connection between the Law written on stone and on the heart, p. 267 Augustine, 'The Holy Spirit, Who is the Finger of God, and who writes the Law of Love on our hearts, that new law, to which the Levitical law looked, for which it yearned', the Spirit comes on the 3rd day, resurrection of Christ, pp 268-74 on the 10 Commandments and the Law of the OT and NT.

⁷The offers specified in Leviticus 23 suggest that it is the offering of Christ which fulfils the offerings made on this festival. It is not only the two loaves which are offered, but seven lambs, and a bull, and two rams, and then two lambs offered with the two loaves (23.19-20). Christopher Wordsworth comments on verse 18-20, 'And this concentration of all these various sacrifices in one day, seems to have symbolized the consummation of all the benefits of Christ's sacrifice by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Whom He sent to abide with His Church for ever, after He Himself had suffered, arisen, and ascended into heaven, as the appointed fruit and witness of His own glorification, and the consecration and sanctification of the whole human race offered to God through Him.'

Leviticus 23.17-21: '*You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the Lord.*¹⁸ *And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.*¹⁹ *And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings.*²⁰ *And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.*²¹ *And you shall make proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a*

The content of the feast of Pentecost is the Resurrection, and the gift of the Pentecost is the Risen Life of Christ. 'For indeed, it is in Christ that human nature first flowered anew'.⁸

Christ Himself is the two loaves presented to God in the ritual of the Old Covenant, Christ in His two natures, the whole Christ. The Lamb of God offers Himself to God the Father, returning love for love - Christ is the first-fruits, Christ is the very beginning of the new creation, Christ is the first flowering of a recreated and redeemed humanity.

But all this is still an incomplete picture, because it is not just Christ the bread of life, who is pictured for us in the two loaves of Pentecost, Christ in Himself, Christ the Head. Rather, the offering of the two loaves of bread invites us to see Christ the bread of life in the members of His body, Christ the two loaves, both Jew and Gentile, God's chosen people, and all peoples chosen in them in two loaves, one loaf made of many grains fired together by the Holy Spirit.⁹

On Pentecost we do not just remember the ritual of the Old Testament; whenever the bread is raised up from the altar and waved before God, we live in the reality which the type promises. When the priest offers and presents the consecrated bread to God, it is first Christ who offers Himself to God in the form of this bread. Christ is the bread of life, and we are all one bread and one body with Him. We are baked together in one loaf and presented to God. This is not only on the day of Pentecost, but we are presented to God, and we seek God whenever we consent and celebrate the mystery of Christ in the sacrament of his body and blood.

In the words of St Augustine, from a sermon preached on the day of Pentecost:

holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute for ever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.'

⁸ Cyril of Alexandria sums up the teaching of the early Church: 'We say that it is the mystery of the Resurrection of the Lord which is signified by the feast of the first-fruits. For indeed it is in Christ that human nature first flowered anew, henceforth doing away with corruption and rejecting the old age of sin' (P. G. LXVIII, 1093 A)', and, 'Therefore Christ is prefigured here in the symbol of the sheaf, considered as the first-fruit of the ears of grain and as the new fruit: He is indeed the first-born from among the dead, the way which opens to us the Resurrection, He Who makes all things new. The old things have passed away, now everything has become new, says Holy Scripture. The sheaf is presented before the face of the Lord: so Emmanuel, risen from the dead, the new and incorruptible fruit of the human race, ascended to heaven to present Himself henceforth for us before the face of the Father' (1096 A)'. Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy*, 322-3.

⁹ Bede the Venerable in a Pentecost sermon, Homily 2.17 on the Gospels, p. 172 in *Homilies on the Gospels: Book Two*, trans Martin & Hurst, CS111.

¹⁰ If you are the body and members of Christ, it is your mystery, [the symbol of you yourselves] which is placed on the Lord's table; it is your mystery [the symbol and reality of you yourselves that] that you receive.¹¹

Again, in the words of St Augustine: ¹² Remember that the bread is not made from one grain of wheat, but of many. When you were exorcized you were, in a manner, ground; when [you were] baptized you were, in a manner, moistened. When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit you were, in a manner, cooked.' We heard almost the very same thing from St Irenaeus in a reading at the Vigil last night.¹³

The loaves waved before God in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and in the Temple picture the Pentecostal reality in which we live. We are offered in the offering we make to God, and we seek to become what we consume. ¹⁴

In the words of St Paul, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service'.¹⁵ This is the sacrifice, the gift of our whole selves joined with the one gift of Christ, which we

¹⁰ Augustine, Sermon 272a, on Pentecost: 'So if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, 'You, though, are the body of Christ and its members' (1 Cor 12:27). Our Lord Jesus Christ is now seated on the Father's right. How [then] can bread be his body? ... The reason these things, brothers and sisters, are called sacraments is that in them one thing is seen and another to be understood. [One thing is seen, another is apprehended by the eye of faith]. We can be seen has a bodily appearance, what is to be understood provides spiritual fruit.'

¹¹ Augustine, Sermon 272a, on Pentecost: 'Why then is he in bread? ... the Apostle [Paul] ... says speaking of this sacrament: "We are many, but we are one loaf, one body". Understand and rejoice: unity, truth, goodness, love. "One loaf"'

See 1 Cor 10.14-16 'Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the [e] communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread'.

¹² Augustine, *ibid.* 'What is that one loaf? "We many are one body."'

¹³ 'This was why the Lord had promised to send the Advocate: he was to prepare us as an offering to God. Like dry flour, which cannot become one lump of dough, one loaf of bread, without moisture, we who are many could not become one in Christ Jesus without the water that comes down from heaven. And like parched ground, which yields no harvest unless it receives moisture, we who were once like a waterless tree could never have lived and borne fruit without this abundant rainfall from above. Through the baptism that liberates us from change and decay we have become one in body; through the Spirit we have become one in soul.' *From 'Against Heresies', St Irenaeus (b. 130)*

¹⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, Book 10.6: "For, as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." (Romans 12:3-6) This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.'

¹⁵ Romans 12:1

evoke in prayer as 'this my sacrifice and yours'. We are offered to God in one loaf, and we seek to become what we consume.

We are all included in the one sacrifice of Christ presented to God in the one loaf which is raised up and waved before God.

In Christ, the true bread uniting the two loaves, Pentecost is the feast which embraces the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the pouring out of the Spirit. In a wonderful turn of phrase, Dr Pusey describes Pentecost as 'the filling up of the Ascension'.

'The wondrous exchange was half made on the Ascension', when human nature in God the Son was taken up into heaven. The Day of Pentecost fulfils the promise and makes the exchange. As humanity dwells in God in Christ, so God, in a new and ineffable way, now dwells in humanity. God dwells not humanity in general, but in each one of us.

'How could any Comforter be better for us than He Who knew our wants, who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Not better, but nearer. Not better, but His very Self again, only in a nearer dearer way. Himself, "to abide with us for ever".¹⁶

This is the wondrous gift of our deification, a life which is both God's life and our life in Him. This Pentecostal fulness is the reality in which we live, and this reality is also vocation, what Pusey's spiritual father John Keble called a deifying vocation.¹⁷ The vocation is expressed succinctly in our Lord's words to us today, living words:

'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'

And again,

'If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'.

This is the law of love which is written in our hearts by the finger of the Spirit. When we seek to live according to this love, we are seeking Christ, and we are

¹⁶ Pusey 'THE CHRISTIAN THE TEMPLE OF GOD', WHIT-SUNDAY, Sermon XXII in Parochial Sermons vol. 1: 'Whit- Sunday is the filling up of the Ascension. The wondrous exchange was half made on the Ascension, when Man in God was taken up into heaven, and sat on His Father's Throne; the Day of Pentecost fulfilled the promise of the Father, and as man now dwelt in God, so God, in a new and ineffable way, dwelt thenceforth in man. He "Who, in substance of flesh, had dwelt among us, had suffered the ills of our mortal nature, had hungered, been scourged, mocked, crucified, died, was now, in that Very Flesh, in the unspeakable Glory of the Godhead ; and now, on this day, He sent us in exchange, God the Holy Spirit, to dwell really, truly, substantially, in the souls of men'.

¹⁷ John Keble, 'Pentecostal Fear': In Him they now live by a new life, which they have entirely from Him; a life which is both His and theirs; whereby they are so joined to Him, as to be verily and indeed "partakers of a Divine nature."

also seeking our best and truest selves in Christ, the people we are called to be.

It is the fire of divine love which bakes many grains into one loaf, and it is the fire of divine love which makes that bread wholesome. I will not say more about this today, but this is the vocation we seek to live into during Trinity season, the long season of growth in Christ.

This vocation also tells us something about the 'holy fear' which gripped those who heard the Gospel. 'Perfect love' casts out fear, but while our love is being perfected, we are wise to be afraid of imperfect love. Our union with Christ is not only our joy, it is also the reason that turning away from God is so painful.¹⁸ When we see something of the wondrous gift of the Spirit, don't we also see how awful it is to turn away from the beauty and goodness and love? Sin for the Christian is not breaking a rule, to sin is to bring unlove into the presence of God's love, to bring what is ugly into the presence of Beauty, it is to turn away from our Beloved who loves us and cherish us. This is painful, but we need to know it. The pain we have in grieving God's love is also a sure promise that God's love is at the core of ourselves, that He lives in us, and we in Him.¹⁹ This is why we can thank God even for the pain of a troubled conscience, because the pain is an invitation to have the courage to turn back to divine goodness and love.

The deifying discipline is not only a rule and a vocation, it is also a kind of programme for the healing of our souls. This feast reveals not only the greatness of God but the greatness of the people in whom God dwells. God the Holy Spirit enlarges our soul so that He may fill it. By God's superabundant gift, 'the soul can contain God Who is Infinite'.²⁰ 'The whole world cannot fill the soul, for it can be filled by nothing but God'. This makes the Temple where God dwells in us an inner kingdom, a palace furnished with treasures old and new, where we commune with God and with one another, where we hear words of promise and forgiveness and hope. But this inner kingdom can also be a kind of hell, where we hear words of condemnation and mocking, where we are frightened, we are feel stuck and without hope. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that Christ our God descends to these depths, and it is the gift of the Spirit that we may hear more clearly in the place of

¹⁸ We are called into the life of Pentecost so that Pentecost becomes truly the life we live. This is the deifying, the godly making discipline of Christian love. But we are also called away from rebellion against God, whatever is false and ugly in our lives.

¹⁹ If turning away from the love of God grieves us, then we already know that he is living in us, and calling us to turn toward him. Repentance is to turn toward God in hope and trust, it is not to look back in despair, but to look to who we are called to become in Christ.

²⁰ Pusey, 'THE CHRISTIAN THE TEMPLE OF GOD', WHIT-SUNDAY, Sermon XXII in Parochial Sermons, vol. 1.

condemnation, words of promise and hope, and the place of the voice that says we are impostors, the word of the Ideal Father who speaks to us as beloved sons and daughters. The deifying discipline of the Holy Spirit is a presence of God at the core of who we are and the light and healing of our souls and our selves. The Spirit not only speaks, Christ touches us in bodily sacraments and appears to us in a human form, He is our food and our drink, the medicine of our souls.

It is no wonder that today is a day of joy. When we prayed in the collect for this day and this week that we may rejoice, we are asking to add our 'yes' to God's yes for us. We are praying that we may allow God to rejoice in us. Yes, brothers and sisters, God waits for our permission to rejoice in us. Let us open the door, let our 'be it unto me according to thy word', by our 'yes' to the invitation of God, may we all open wide the door of our hearts to the indwelling of God.

Joy in Christ, Joy with the Holy Spirit, the gift of divine life, is the particular gift of these 50 days of the extended and alleluia-filled festival of Easter. Pentecost is a reality in which we live, it is a vocation, and Pentecost is a festival of joy. Let us seek to become the very bread which we consume, Christ dwelling in the inner kingdom of our hearts by Divine love, God the Holy Spirit, another Comforter, God's very self.