

Today is the Feast of Pentecost and the church around the world celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the church on this very day. Pentecost is one of the three most important festivals for Christians along with Easter and Christmas. Unfortunately we do not give it much importance as we should. The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word Penta meaning "fifty" and counting of 50 days from the day of resurrection. This was also the Greek name for the Jewish feast of weeks deriving from its occurrence 50 days from the Passover. Because the early Christians received the Holy Spirit on this day, the term is now more commonly used to refer to that which is recorded for us in Acts chapter 2.

According to Acts, the Apostles remained in Jerusalem after the resurrection appearances. On the day of Pentecost they were gathered in one house when the Holy Spirit came upon them sounding like a mighty wind and appearing like tongues of fire upon each one of them. The apostles then began to speak in foreign languages which made the foreign Jews amazed to hear their languages spoken by these Galilean Jews. They were asking one another, "What does this mean?" Some made fun of them and said they had too much wine.

Peter then stood up and addressed the crowd. He tells them it was only nine in the morning and that none of them were drunk. Peter then quotes God's promise through the Prophet Joel saying, "In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams, even on my servants both men and women. I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy and everyone who calls out on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter explains that the prophecy was now fulfilled with the coming of the Spirit on all the believers. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was a visiting Spirit and not a resident Spirit. In other words people were given the presence of the Spirit for a short period of time and then the Spirit was withdrawn. However in the New Testament from the day of Pentecost we notice that the Spirit has come to stay in the hearts of every believer.

What was the purpose that the Holy Spirit has been freely given to all believers? In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 12 Paul gives us the answer. First of all, it is for the confession, "Jesus is Lord." We cannot claim Jesus to be our Lord except through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Secondly, Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit's gifts are given for the common good. Diverse gifts have been distributed within the body of Christ so that we work together, complementing and affirming each other rather than thinking one as superior or inferior. The basis for this as Paul states is that we were all baptized by the same Holy Spirit and therefore in dying and rising with Christ in Baptism we are all parts of the body of Christ.

Paul uses the analogy of the human body to explain the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The body is one and made up of many parts. Though all its parts are many they form one body and that body is the body of Christ. Paul therefore reminds us that the foot cannot say, "I am not an eye therefore I do not belong to the body." Diversity is the very essence of the body of Christ. In our churches we tend to look up to those with spectacular gifts and put down others with ordinary gifts. Paul's warning for is that the Holy Spirit is given for the common good. Therefore we need to affirm each other.

The Holy Spirit is also a Spirit of truth. In John 14:16 Jesus says, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you." The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth above all to the truth of Jesus. He is the one who removes the scales of our eyes that we may see Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Another picture that Jesus uses is of an advocate. An advocate is one who pleads our case before the judge. Likewise, the Holy Spirit stands with us and intercedes for us before the Father. He is the one who mediates for us and enables us to pray with deep sighs and groans.

Maybe some of you may be wondering as to how I can receive the Holy Spirit? Paul writing to the Ephesians tells us, "and you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." Paul reminds us that the moment we receive Christ as our Lord and Saviour in our lives we are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. May we truly open ourselves to the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit so that we may lead lives of integrity and holiness all the days of our lives.

**Shalom!, Dr. Paul Swarup**