

Today is Pentecost Sunday and we give thanks to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus the feast of Pentecost was celebrated which was significant for two things: one, it was an agricultural festival and was after the grain harvest, and two it was the feast of weeks or Pentecost because it took place 50 days after the Passover festival, in remembrance of the Exodus and was also the time when the grain harvesting began. At a later age it was also observed as the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, because it was reckoned to have happened 50 days after the Exodus. Pentecost is one of the three most important festivals of the church following Christmas and Easter.

This morning I would like us to focus on Paul's letter to the Corinthians which was read to us as the 2nd reading. In the first three verse of chapter 12 Paul tells us why the gift of the Holy Spirit was primarily given. Though the Holy Spirit gives us various gifts the gift of the Holy Spirit is primarily to make the confession 'Jesus is Lord'. It is only with the presence of the Spirit that we come to recognise Jesus as Lord. The Spirit of God is the one who removes the veils of our eyes and helps us to see Jesus clearly. The purpose is that God's name will be glorified. The confession 'Jesus is Lord' was the radical confession of the early Christians which meant absolute allegiance to Jesus as one's God which would set them apart from Jews who refused to accept Jesus as Lord, and from the Gentiles who had many gods. For Paul the ultimate criteria of the Spirit's activity was not the power and the gifts available but the exaltation of Jesus as the Lord through those gifts.

In verse 4-11 Paul talks about the Spirit of God giving gifts for the common good. He says, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." There is unity and diversity as much as it is in the trinity. These are all given for the common good. The source is God and the manifestations are given to each believer.

Paul then comes up with a list of gifts which can be clubbed under three headings: Gifts of Revelation, Gifts of Power and Gifts of Communication. Under the Gifts of Revelation there is wisdom, knowledge and discernment. A word of wisdom is when the Spirit guides you in a crises and tells you exactly what to do. It is God's wisdom given to you at that moment. A word of knowledge is information which God gives which cannot be retrieved or gained through any natural means. The Gift of discernment is also the ability to see through things, to look at the true nature of a thing or a person. God gives us these Gifts of Revelation as and when there is a need within the community of faith.

The second set of gifts can be clubbed as the Gifts of Power under which faith, healing and miracles can be put together. Faith is an unusual faith which inspite of the terrible circumstances you may face, gives you a deep sense of peace. Gifts of healing come in many different ways. In some occasions the healing is immediate and in some occasions the healing is gradual. Then there are gifts of miracles. Miracles are power encounters. What seems to be impossible is made possible by these power encounters. Our God is a God of miracles. Many of us can testify to the miracles that he has worked in our lives.

Finally, there are the three Gifts of Communication: prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues. The gift of prophecy is not just telling about the future but speaking the mind and heart of God. All prophecy has to be in line with God's word to verify its authenticity. Gifts of tongues are given for us to glorify God and to intercede in a language which we do not understand ourselves. In some cases the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation are given so that people are made aware of what God is speaking to them at that moment.

All these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to enable us to confess 'Jesus is Lord', to build up his kingdom and to bring glory to his name. We can specifically ask God for these gifts as he is a Father who generously gives gifts to his children. May we be anointed afresh on this Pentecost morning and be filled with his gifts.