

Homily on Sunday 27th October 2024.

Texts: Deuteronomy 32 :1-4 ; John 14 :15-26; and Psalm 119:121-136

Title: The guidance of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

I still remember our feelings as parents (Claire and I) just two months ago, when our son Oliver was preparing to study at the University of Kent. For weeks, nearly every dinner together, we were trying to see any potential scenario and find the immediate assistance to him in his new independent life. I am sure that many of you have experienced a similar challenging situation preparing a child who is leaving home. The passage of today refers to Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure and in the context of the passage read today, he makes a series of promises to them. For instance, he promises that the believers will do greater deeds than him; that he will do whatever believers ask in his name; or that he will ask the Father to give another Advocate for the disciples when he is no longer with them.

The question is how the disciples manage everything after Jesus leaves?

In a certain way, the prospect of doing "greater things" announced before, is an anticipation of the need for an enabling power, the manifestation of God himself by his Spirit.

‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’. In effect, the Gospel of John states that if they love him and obey his commandments, Jesus will ask the Father to provide another Advocate (the Holy Spirit) who will act in Jesus' place to mediate the presence of the Father and be with the disciples for ever.

But Jesus also promises that they will see him again after he goes away; he will not leave the disciples alone, as orphans, because the Spirit will teach, guide and be with them always. The Advocate, or helper, the "Spirit of truth" will guide the disciples, testifying about Jesus and reminding them of all that he taught them.

Jesus explains what it means to love him: it is to keep his commandments and declares that those who love him will be also loved by God. The Father will send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name; just as Jesus came in his Father's name.

The Gospel gives us a clear idea about two of the main functions of the Advocate: to "teach you everything" and "remind you of all that Jesus has said".

Why is the Advocate important for us today? Well, first of all, we know that the Spirit dwells within believers. The Holy Spirit gives rise to faith, guides the

prayers and worship of Christians, and pours love into human hearts, leading us to a Christian life. The Spirit also leads us into true knowledge of God, including when we read the Holy Bible according to our time.

We can note the role of the Spirit in our own Christian initiation in our Baptisms and Confirmations. As you know, we had a Confirmation service this morning where the Bishop prayed to God to let the Holy Spirit rest upon them: the Spirit of **wisdom** and understanding; the Spirit of **counsel** and inward strength; the Spirit of **knowledge** and true godliness...(...)"

Let us briefly reflect about some of these aspects!

Again, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth which will **teach us** everything and **remind us of** all Jesus has said to the disciples.

The Holy Spirit will sustain us in at least three aspects: in prompting Christian communities; in the understanding of the Holy Scriptures; and it will constantly remind us of the commandments of love.

First, the Spirit works through us as a Christian community and as individuals, in which our worship lies at the core. It is good to think about how we respond as a community to the prompting of the Spirit.

Just an example, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we are renewing the church. Our Building Tomorrow Project, which comes from the prayers and generosity of members of the congregation, is going to improve our church space for now and for future generations and will help us to grow our possibilities of worship, mission, and discipleship, to reach those who have not yet heard the Gospel, and potentially to serve the broader community in Geneva.

Second, the understanding of Scripture along the centuries is also moved by the Holy Spirit. We need to listen to the word of God in Scripture today! As good Anglicans, we all embrace the authority of the Holy Bible, tradition, and reason, following the Holy Spirit, who is guiding us in a world in constant and very rapid transformations. For instance, the Church of England of 2024 is not the Church of England of 1991! Multiple reasonable transformations have been reshaping the church, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a church much more inclusive in terms of gender or ethnicity, certainly more inclusive in all the fronts and at all levels [1992 Ordination of women to priesthood; 2015 first female bishop].

Third, the Spirit is constantly reminding us of Jesus' commandments of love. He has called us to follow the 'greatest' commandments (Matthew 22:38-39) to **love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all**

your mind and to love your neighbour as yourself. And we also need to “love one another” that the world can know that we are all Jesus’ disciples. Love one another in many ways, like -for instance- the involvement in the area of **pastoral care**, where we are all invited to help.

What could be the message for us today?

We have a standing invitation to follow the commandments of Jesus Christ, to be witness of his transforming presence in us and in others, guided by the Holy Spirit. You and I are part of that endless chain of generations of Christians, and we are followers of Christ in every aspect of our lives through prayer, through worship, in word and deeds, through communion, always renewed by the Holy Spirit.

What else can we do?

For example, we all can pray for the Holy Spirit to work in hearts and minds, so that the message of the gospel would be received with love and bear fruits, even in this individualist and materialist Western world of the twenty-first century.

Each one of us can embrace the calling to be a witness to Jesus Christ, praying for more people -of all ages- might come to faith.

We can commit to prayer, listening and discernment in the power of the Holy Spirit in us, to find ways to transform individuals and always to take care of the needy.

Finally, we can remember the letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians: **...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (...) if we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.**

I would like to invite you to think how we might open ourselves to be guided by the Spirit this coming week and how we will act upon it.

Amen.