

I think – at least I hope – you’ll agree that Fr Paul and I are caring, mild-mannered, affable Pastors. We’re not prone to being fiery or having ‘hissy-fits’ or throwing our ecclesiastical toys out of the pram. In fact, to parody Gilbert & Sullivan’s ‘HMS Pinafore:’ ‘We are the very models of modern Catholic Clergymen!’

Now, if St Paul were the Pastor of this Parish, you wouldn’t know what had hit you: but what St Paul, Fr Paul, and I have in common is a deep, passionate love for the Lord.

Yes, we express it in different ways because we’re different people; nevertheless, that’s what drives us, that’s what drove St Paul.

Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, a portion of which we’ve just heard, is his most passionate defence of his preaching in any of his Letters.

In fact, it could almost be described as his ‘Christian Declaration of Independence.’

Paul had preached to the Gentiles the ‘good news’ that there’s complete forgiveness of sin, in Jesus; there’s liberation from the power of evil, in Jesus; there’s unending life that comes from faith and fidelity, to Jesus.

As he went about his mission, it seems his steps were dogged by a group of Jewish converts to Christianity who were trying to undermine his preaching of the Gospel to the new Gentile Christian converts in Galatia.

These extremist Jewish converts to Christianity insisted that Gentile Christians had to observe the entirety of the Jewish Law, including male circumcision, to know full salvation in Christ.

When Paul heard this he ‘went ballistic,’ as we might say today.

In fact, he was so incensed that they were trying to lay impossible burdens on these new Christians that he wrote in Galatians: “I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would castrate themselves!” [Gal. 5: 12](#)

Very powerful words indeed: but what was at the heart of Paul’s concern was his refusal to allow anything to diminish the power of the Cross of Christ.

The redemption we have in Jesus, he said, is final, complete, and universal: it needs no additions, or, indeed, subtractions!

We don’t need physical circumcision, Paul says that what we need is a circumcision of the heart – a cutting away of sin - to make us alive to Jesus.

As he writes to the Colossian Christians: “You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet *cut away*. Then [by His Cross] God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. [Col. 2: 13](#)

Jesus alone gives new life from the death of sin. Jesus alone gives supernatural life – eternal life – because He is the Lord of Life.

In the Gospel today, in the little town of Nain, Jesus, the Lord of Life, meets with death.

As He and his followers are going into Nain, they meet a funeral procession going out to the town’s burial ground.

The funeral atmosphere was one of weeping and wailing and sadness; especially so because this woman was already a widow, and had now lost her only son; her only means of support.

In contrast, Jesus’ procession was one filled with excitement, and joy.

According to Jewish tradition, if you met a funeral procession you were obliged to join it, so we have the collision of two diametrically different parades.

However, Jesus does more than just stop, and then join in as a passive mourner.

No: Luke tells us that: “When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion.” [Lk. 7: 13](#) for this widow who’d now lost her only son.

Then Jesus says to her: “‘Do not weep.’ Then he came forward and touched the [body wrapped in a shroud], and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’” [Lk. 7: 13 – 14](#)

Touching a corpse caused ritual defilement under the Jewish Law. Jesus should have been defiled by touching the dead man but, He touches the dead, lifeless body, and says: “Rise!”

Jesus, the Word of God, speaks, and it happens: even the dead hear Him, and obey.

It doesn't matter to God how long you've been dead, how you died, or whether you were buried or cremated: He can take care of it.

Jesus rose bodily from the dead; when He returns at the end of time He will raise us bodily from the dead too.

In the meantime, Jesus speaks to those who are spiritually dead, and brings them to life too.

Let's face it, we've all felt spiritually dead at times in our lives – I know for sure I have.

We go through the motions of being a Christian whilst, inside, we feel that our hearts are dead and bare, like a tree in winter: but, with the Lord's healing touch, we can know: "Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green." JMC Crum: Now The Green Blade Rises

And if we don't seek the Lord's touch – His Breath of Life – breathing into the sailboat of our soul, we'll be stuck in the doldrums.

The Holy Spirit is the wind which fills its sails and drives it forward, and the gusts of wind are the gifts of the Spirit.

Lacking His impulse and His grace, we don't go forward.

The Holy Spirit draws us into the heart of the living God, and saves us from being closed in on ourselves: and also saves the Church from being closed in on herself too.

Pope John XXIII famously said that he wanted to open the windows of the Church to let the fresh air of the Holy Spirit rush in.

I sense we're on the threshold of that happening now; a fresh, powerful, disturbing, yet exciting, outpouring of the Spirit on the Church

The Spirit, who impels us to open the doors, and go forth to proclaim and bear witness to the good news of the Gospel, to communicate the joy of faith, the encounter with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the soul of mission; and every Christian, through their Baptism, is given the mandate to be a missionary.

The events that took place in Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago aren't something far removed from us; they're events, which affect us, and become a lived experience in each of us.

The Pentecost of the Upper Room in Jerusalem is the beginning, a beginning which endures.

The Holy Spirit is the supreme gift of the risen Jesus to Mary, His Mother, and to His Apostles; yet he wants that gift to reach everyone so that we can be: "Dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus." Rm. 6: 11

And, that sort of raising from the death of sin is just as powerful, and as much of a miracle by Jesus, as His raising of the widow's son to life from physical death.

A Church, and a person, that evangelises – witnesses to Jesus - must always begin from prayer; from asking, as did Mary, and the Apostles in the Upper Room, for the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Only a faithful, intense relationship with God allows us to go out of ourselves, and announce the Gospel boldly.

Today the Church – we – feel the wind of the Holy Spirit who helps us, who shows us the right road; and so, let's go on our way with new enthusiasm.

Let's renew each day our trust in the Holy Spirit's action.

Let's let ourselves be guided by Him.

Let's be men and women of prayer who witness to the Gospel with courage, becoming instruments of God's unity and love in our world.