

And he will declare to you the things that are to come.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to speak French.

I always think of this passage, from PG Wodehouse's 'The Luck of the Bodkins', on Pentecost. As a former student of foreign languages myself, I know that innate to speaking one is a creeping sense of embarrassment at getting things, inevitably, wrong.

We have in our reading from the Book of Acts this morning, perhaps the most famous outbreak of foreign language speaking in history. Much about it is miraculous, but perhaps most of all is the fact that nobody seems to be embarrassed. No wonder the onlookers thought they were drunk.

Responsible for this is, of course, the Holy Spirit. God the unseen mover, comforter and sustainer. Given the Spirit- or Holy Ghost or Paraclete- is a person of the Trinity, we are, compared to the Father and the Son often reluctant to think about how the spirit might move in our lives. We tend not to want to talk about the Holy Spirit- perhaps because we feel on shakier ground. Like the Englishman thinking French it makes us feel awkward.

When we do consider the third person of the Trinity, as today, there is a tendency for us to assume that the message of this great feast of the Holy Spirit is about speaking. About whirlwinds and fire and the active impressive movements of the Spirit which we all long to see. I would suggest that there is another manifestation of the Spirit which we might profitably think about today. In fact, it is about listening. Note that what is amazing to those first disciples is that they can hear and that they can understand, less so that they can speak.

This is underlined in our Gospel reading, where Jesus tells us that the spirit 'will declare to you the things that are to come.' Now, listening to advice is never an easy thing. Listening to prophecy is even harder. When it comes to the future course of our lives- whether it is as individuals or as communities, we like to think that the person or people who will control those things that we have set before us is, well, us.

But cruel experience tells us that is not the case. The truth is we very rarely have absolute control. Pentecost is as much a lesson in this as it is about power or anointing. Christ makes abundantly clear that, though we will work in partnership with the Holy Spirit, that will mostly involve the process of listening to what is said rather than

directing what is done. Handing things over to the power of the spirit, listening to the power of the spirit, and then, even when we don't much like what we hear, embracing the path of the spirit- that is true liberty and the true calling which is placed on every Christian heart.

What things are to come for you, for us? As a church and as a community? What signs can we be looking for, what sounds can we be listening for? And yes: this is a task for us, a 'we' question not an I question. I may be the one in the outfit but the ministry of the Church is the task of us all.

There can be a tendency to think the spirit only talks to individuals. That listening to the spirit is about a sort of internal monologue. In the name of such an idea very stupid and very wicked things have been done. In fact, in the Bible, the spirit is much more likely to speak in and through and to a gathering of the people of God. Be that the voice of the Lord amongst the people of Israel in the Old Testament or the power of the spirit shown to the assembled disciples at Pentecost or the voice which speaks to the Churches in the Book of Revelation.

Do not think that the spirit cannot to speak to us as a body, or that the things it will declare are to or for other people. The spirit is for us now and speaks to us now, as a community, as a church and as the people of God.

I have profound hope for this community- and I hope you do too. That there are many things we can do together to make known the love of God in the world, to spread the message that, as Christ tells us, the ruling evils of this world are condemned and that the rule of love and grace and truth is there and open to all.

What is the spirit saying to us? How might we discern it?

Well, there are five simple things we can all do to aid the listening process:

1. Come to Church! That sounds obvious but I know there are days when that is really hard: days when doubt or depression or simply the busyness of our lives can get in the way. But come to this place- because it is a place where people have heard the voice of the Spirit for well over a thousand years. These are well prayed in stones: add your story to them and listen to what it is that the Holy Ghost might say here in this generation.
2. Receive the Holy Sacrament. There is no greater privilege or joy for the Christian than to experience Communion- that is to say a moment of oneness, of direct communication with God. As you come to the altar today, do so with a heart and mind open. You will be amazed what things will come to you through the power of Christ's body and blood.

3. Read Holy Scripture. At the heart of the Bible are stories. Stories of people encountering God. Throughout there is the tangible sense of the Spirit working in people's lives. The people of the past are not so different to us: in the Bible they succeed and they fail, they do good and they do bad, they make the right decisions and the wrong ones: Scripture stands to inspire us, to remind us that we don't go through a lot of these things for the first time, and nor do we go through them alone. Take time to read it, to ponder it, to be inspired by it.
4. Serve you neighbour. The example and message of Christ is abundantly clear, that the times we are mostly likely to see God at work is when we ourselves take the initiative to serve. Serving our neighbour- and there are so many opportunities to do so here in Charlbury- provides space and encounter where the spirit might speak to us in unexpected times and through unexpected people. Again, if Scripture tells us anything, these are the Spirit's preferred modes of engagement with us.
5. Pray. Above all else and undergirding all else is prayer. This is where that voice of the Spirit might most clearly be heard. Pray not just when you come here but always, pray in thanks and in despair, in joy and in sorrow, always present the key parts of your own and our common life to God. For he can and will do marvellous things.

Many of you, I know, do all those things already. Many I know do some, but might consider doing all. Many of you will yearn to do more of all of them. Whatever stage you are at, consider this Whit Sunday to be a moment to discern how you might do these things in a spirit of listening. Consider this day as the start of a process of trying to hear what it is the Spirit is saying to this whole community. To us all.

The spirit will declare to us the things that are to come. Let us together listen pray and discern what they might be.

In the name of the