

O Holy Spirit, inspire us as we ponder the written word and, and help us to glorify God as we think about how to follow Jesus. Amen.

- What are you thirsty for? A meal out in a pub? A hug with your grandchildren? A week's break in Tenerife? Everything to go back to normal? A job? Are these the sorts of thirsts you have? How are you going to quench your thirst?
- The Jews were busy quenching things with water at their Harvest Festival.
 - Pentecost is not just a Christian Festival. Fifty days – hence the word Pentecost – fifty days after Passover was the Jewish feast of Booths. This was their main agricultural festival of the year when they thanked God for the Harvest. As part of this they splashed water around in the temple out of a large golden jug. I don't know but I imagine this was something to do with thanking God for enough rain to make the crop grow.
 - There was a much more hand to mouth existence than ours, so the rain was vital for them to be able to eat.
- It was the Jewish feast of Booths, Pentecost, which was the setting for Jesus in today's Gospel reading. He was in the temple. Quite likely that the water had just been splashed about from the large golden jug.
- Which all gives a natural context for Jesus's words. *'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me'*.
- What are you thirsty for?
- And what is Jesus offering?
- And are they the same thing?
- Jesus actually says three things about water in this short passage. Listen and count them. *'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."'*
- *'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me'*. Quite clearly he is not offering a single use plastic bottle of Scottish spring water. Quite clearly also he is offering something alternative to the water splashing in the temple. Thirst is about fulfilling some unfulfilled yearning. Maybe he is saying, 'Bring all your unfulfilled yearnings, whether they be for a hug, a job or a week's holiday. Bring them all to me. And see what happens.'
- *'let the one who believes in me drink'*. Surely the key word here is 'believe'? There's no point bringing them as a challenge, a test, in a *'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'*, sort of way. Belief is clearly integral if you want your thirst to be slaked. Faith and trust and hope. Bring your yearnings in trust. And see what happens!
- Because remember, we're not just believing in anything. We're believing that Jesus is our Saviour, that he does have an effect on our lives, that he does offer a new life, a changed life today. And we have the evidence of the cross and resurrection. We have the evidence of the changed lives of the disciples. And as we heard in the Acts reading their lives were turned upside down! This is more than emotions and feelings. This is action and a new direction!
- *"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."* This is the third mention of water by Jesus in a line and a half. This is not about drinking. It's about spewing! This is not about receiving. It's about producing. Can you begin to see the link between these words, which surely the disciples heard Jesus speak, and what happened to them in the Acts reading?
- And that's not surprising because John goes on to comment about Jesus' words: *'Now he said this about the Spirit'*
- *"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."* The Spirit enables things to happen. And the Spirit is concerned with things of the heart. What we really feel strongly about. *"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."*
- So what do you feel strongly about? What do you thirst for? Bring them to Jesus and see what happens!

- I'm sure the disciples had lots of things they thirsted for whilst they were all together in one place on another Feast of Pentecost, the Harvest Festival, 50 days after Easter, a year or so later than the one with Jesus we've been considering.
 - I wonder what they thirsted for? Possibly order out the chaos of the last 50 days? Possibly Jesus to reappear and lead them somewhere? Possibly fame and fortune? Possibly still fury and bitterness at what Judas did? Perhaps still shame at how they themselves had abandoned Jesus. Surely numbness and shock at all that had happened? And maybe a soupcon of wanting to follow in the adventure that Jesus had promised them but not having a clue about what to do next. Except wait.
 - Lots of very natural responses. Some more worthy than others!
 - And I am quite sure that they were bringing all these thirsts to Jesus. After all, *'to whom else can we go?'*
- And then the anointing with the Holy Spirit. Rushing! Burning! Wind and flame of Pentecost!
- And somehow they were rushing outside with burning hearts and gabbling away to all and sundry. *"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."* And the people who heard said, in amazement at the overturning of the tower of Babel said, *'we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'* So not just about the weather or vacant words of comfort then? Less about 'Smile, it's a sunny day. I'm sure it'll get better soon', and more about, 'Look at what God has done!'
- And you don't have to read very much of Acts to prove that life really was never the same again. Not easy. Not ordered. Not safe. Just incredible!
- So what had happened to all their thirsts they had brought to Jesus? Their insecurity? Their bitterness, shame and anger? Their desire for order and control? Well it seems that the Holy Spirit worked through all these thirsts, heightening some and destroying the power of others.
- They were clearly emboldened to follow in the adventure Jesus was leading them on. And this seems to be the major thrust. I'm sure over the weeks and years ahead, they still had flashbacks to their own failings and their less honourable emotions, but their power seems to have been taken away, and in that way their thirst was quenched through bringing it to Jesus, because they were so busy following in the adventure. Again, you don't have to read very much further in Acts to discover that these first Christians were far from perfect. Peter and Paul used to have stand up rows. But I suspect it was only the Holy Spirit who allowed them to work through these rows, as they kept in focus the greater importance of who they were both engaged in following.
- And the crowd who heard these first disciples on their Feast of Pentecost? What sort of Harvest did it produce in the crowd's hearts? Well *'All were amazed and perplexed, ... But others sneered and said, 'They're drunk!'*
- So no change from today then. When we allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us, we do not always get a positive response! The harvest of humanity is not always great at this Harvest Festival!
- Skip forward 2 000 years to another Pentecost This time in the year 2020.
- What do you thirst about? And have you brought it to Jesus and allowed the Holy Spirit to show you what is important and what is really not? That's not always comfortable by the way, as you give up your dreams for a new BMW and a Jacuzzi in the garden. Are you engaged on an adventure with Jesus?
- In 2020, perhaps more than most years, I see people struggling. Struggling with worry, struggling with frustration. Struggling with loneliness or grief. Struggling with powerlessness. These are very real thirsts.
- I also see a world struggling. With over-population. With a very unequal divide between rich and poor. With a completely unsustainable way of life. And resulting from all of these, struggling with increasing numbers of migrants, refugees and unstable and extreme regimes. Each one of these is a very dangerous and very real thirst as well.
- How do these major thirsts support or conflict with your own individual thirsts and desires?
- And what do you think the Holy Spirit is calling us to proclaim as Christians as we are bundled into the market place of society, chaotically speaking to people of many different cultures and languages?
 - And are we doing proclaiming it?
 - How is the Holy Spirit prompting you in all this? Amen!