



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 9 January 2022 – Baptism of Christ
Readings: Acts of the Apostles 8: 14-17 & the Gospel of Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Revisiting the past

Sitting and listening to the loving tribute paid by Nigel Kenney to the memory of his father Chris at the funeral on Friday, transported me back to my own childhood. My father too loved his puddings! Daddy also had a love for gospel songs sung by Jim Reeves. In fact, he played the records so often that even now, on the rare occasion that I hear one of Jim's songs, I can sing them through pretty much by heart. I tell you this for far better a reason than just a trip down memory lane because the other matter over which my father was scrupulous, similar to Chris with his family, was reading the Bible and praying with me and my sisters every day. What is instilled in us from childhood remains throughout our lives.

How do you find a word that means ...?

Just reverting briefly to Dad's collection of LP records there was one other record that featured frequently and that was Roger and Hammerstein's songs of *The Sound of Music*. Those too, I committed to memory such that when, the other day, the film was on TV, I sat down and sang along contentedly. One of the songs sung by the nuns in the Abbey tries to describe Maria. A verse contains these lyrics:

How do you solve a problem like Maria?
How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?
How do you find a word that means Maria?

The nuns continue making various suggestions. In a way that's rather similar to many people's experiences of the Holy Spirit, how do you find a word that means this person of the Holy Trinity? A breath? A fire? A dove? It would be difficult to pin any of those down!

The Holy Spirit - a gift that keeps giving

Receipt of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in both the extract from Acts that Margaret read to us as also, in Luke describing Jesus' baptism. The first thing to note is that God freely bestows the Holy Spirit on Jew and gentile alike. He offered himself to save all people. Second, it's a gift not a commodity. God gives his Spirit freely to those who believe in him. Third, gifts are given out of the loving-kindness of the donor: there should be no expectation by the recipient. They are designed to give joy improving the life of the one who receives the gift. In the case of the Holy Spirit, through his baptism, Jesus enables this gift to be shared with us to sustain our faith. But how can the Holy Spirit exist in any shape or form

that makes a difference to our life and our faith? Well, gifts offer no benefit at all if they're not used.

Diminishing the gift

This reminds me of an account my father told me of his wartime evacuation years in England. Early on, he worked on a farm and was given a basket of three dozen eggs(!) to give to a town family, that had given his mother and three youngest siblings shelter for a year after their arrival in England. The gift was a rare treat intended to give joy and much needed nutrients in those days of strict rationing. A month later, my father visited that family again, apologising for arriving empty-handed, as he had moved from the farm to a factory making oxygen systems for Lancaster Bombers. He was perplexed to note that the eggs he had given were still in their basket uneaten: Daddy could not resist asking why. The family said "Oh! They were far too good to use!" Sadly, of course, the eggs were utterly wasted. A gift used is a blessing to the recipient: and blessings multiply when shared with others: hoarded they waste away.

Using the gift purposefully

The Holy Spirit wants to be used. Do we fear using our gift of the Holy Spirit worried of messing things up? At first, the early disciples didn't always get things right but by perseverance they, in turn, handed on a legacy of faith to new generations. Or, is it a case that we can't grasp how to put our gifts of the Holy Spirit into action? Then let's pray for direction in using them. With courage, we can be the breath of fresh air giving someone a much-needed understanding of life lived with faith. Or, perhaps be the fire that sparks a passion for active Christian service in others. Or, the dove who comforts people in their suffering. All these are spirit-led blessings that ripple and multiply for our generation and the next.

There are many gifts of the Holy Spirit that can be shared, for we're not called to live our faith in isolation but in community, so that all may hear the word of God and have the opportunity to receive his Spirit. Faith, energised by the Holy Spirit breathes God's life, and light, and truth into others. All are called to be children of the living God but they will not learn that they are precious his sight if we keep all of our spiritual eggs in own basket.

To conclude, what word in action, means 'Holy Spirit' to you?

Amen.