

Pentecost (Platinum Jubilee weekend)

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew, Guernsey, on Sunday 5 June 2022¹

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 2 verses 1-21 and John 14 verses 8-17

I confess that my first reaction, on discovering that the Platinum Jubilee weekend coincided with the feast of Pentecost, was slight annoyance that a major Christian feast might be overshadowed by the celebration of Her Majesty's remarkable Jubilee. But it didn't take me long to realise that I was mistaken. Rather, the two celebrations are remarkably linked and intertwined.

I would like to reflect on three points.

First, the gift of the Holy Spirit is to empower us for living our everyday lives. And that is no less true for Her Majesty The Queen than it is for each of us. At her Coronation, sixty-nine years ago last Thursday, The Queen was anointed, in the most private and solemn part of the ceremony, with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to sustain her in her vocation to serve her people, which she has done so faithfully. The ancient hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, was sung before the anointing at the Coronation, just as it is sung before the ordination of bishops and priests. We are praying today that we may be sustained in the duties of our daily life, as has so manifestly been the case for Her Majesty.

Second, one of the prayers in the service prescribed for use each year on the anniversary of The Queen's accession to the throne speaks of the danger of division in our national, and Bailiwick, life: 'Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord.' Unity, whether in the Church or in the wider dimensions of our common life, is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Queen has a remarkable position as a focus for unity in the United Kingdom, in the Commonwealth and in the Bailiwicks of Guernsey and Jersey, the oldest self-governing possessions of the English Crown, as part of the lost Duchy of Normandy. That is godly and important work.

Thirdly, the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, taking us back to the first Day of Pentecost, underlines the significance of Pentecost as the reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel in the early chapters of Genesis, where there is a description of the division of humanity into a multiplicity of languages, and mutual incomprehension. However on Pentecost, the crowd, gathered from all around the known world, from the nations and areas listed, have no difficulty in understanding the apostles: 'Each heard them speaking in the native language of each'. In a remarkable experience of simultaneous translation, the message inspired by the Holy Spirit broke through human divisions.

Her Majesty speaks frequently of her Christian faith, naturally and without any self-consciousness, notably in her Christmas addresses, where (to quote from the reading from Acts), she is 'speaking about God's deeds of power'.

One of the most important aspects of Her Majesty's life has been her commitment to the Commonwealth, which embraces fifty-four member states, in every continent, and a

¹ I acknowledge my gratitude to the author of an article at <http://laudablepractice.blogspot.com> which has helped me to prepare this sermon

significant proportion of the world's population. That gathering in of the nations is surely a work of the Holy Spirit.

The message of Pentecost is gift and vocation, the call to unity and the transcending of national boundaries in a greater common interest. Remarkably, that message is proclaimed powerfully in the reign of Her Majesty The Queen.

God save the Queen!