

PENTECOST GRACE DAY BY DAY

All through Easter time we've been reading and listening to that great book, the Acts of the Apostles. While it's about all the apostles of the Infant Church, all the missionaries of God's love at that time, it's also about the love of God in person. I'm speaking, of course, about the Holy Spirit, who in the Book of Acts is both God's love in person (Grace) and the chief apostle. Again and again we notice the Holy Spirit speaking to people and their needs through other human beings. Again and again other human beings act as agents, instruments, and missionaries of the Spirit. That's very significant, as one of the main ways the Holy Spirit still enlightens and heals you and me.

Surely one of our biggest human needs is to actually grow up. Becoming mature-thinking and mature-acting persons involves moving away from selfishness and self-centredness and reaching out to others with real interest, care and concern. It also involves working with others for that better world which is God's Kingdom on earth. What's particularly vital in our dealings with others, and especially with close family and friends, are our conversations. This is especially the case when chatting to one another gets beyond the superficial, and moves into what matters most. On both sides, the sharing is both listening to the other's words and positively responding. By mutually sharing our insights with open minds and hearts, we assist one another to grow into good, sensible, responsible and warm-hearted people.

Again and again, if we are to make progress and change our ways of living, it may be necessary to hear from those we talk to, things which are challenging, even quite painful things, but which may free us to become better people. In fact, along the journey of a whole life-time, we may hear ourselves being called to face many challenges and make many changes.

There's another dimension to all this. In fact, there's a third party in all this. In the words of others, even unintended remarks and chance conversations, God's word may be addressed to us, God's word of truth, that sets us free to do better and become better.

The word of God as it comes to us from others can be painful. We need strength to reply to the challenges God speaks to us through others. Perhaps what we hear from others stirs up certain fears. Can we afford to take the risk of listening to them? Isn't there some danger that if we listen to them, our self-esteem may shrink? Isn't there some danger that if we listen to the truth coming from another person, we may become psychologically dependent, and even under that person's spell?

Faced with such risks, it takes considerable courage to engage in the kind of conversations that challenge us to become more mature, more responsible, more caring and more generous people. We find the courage to face the truth only if the other addresses us sensitively - with respect, care and love. Were we to be brutally confronted with what may be in us, e.g. our superficiality, anger, resentment and self-rejection, we might crumble to pieces. But the gift of the acceptance, encouragement and support of the other person creates in us the strength we need – to listen honestly, to know ourselves better, and to accept ourselves with both our weaknesses and our strengths and possibilities. The gift of

the other's care and concern, i.e. the friendship and communion they give us, creates in us a deep sense of freedom – freedom to become a better person, freedom to open up and to share with others in turn. The love and care that has been given to us.

Faced with the risks involved, the freedom to take those risks and let ourselves enter into a life-giving conversation and sharing with others, is experienced as both a power and a gift, given by those who love and care for us. Yet should we start to express our gratitude to them, it would be too much. For typically, those significant others we talk to and support us, simply don't realize just how much they mean to us. They may cut us short, or say something like, *'it was nothing'*; or *'what are friends for?'*

Their strength and support, in fact, goes beyond what they see themselves as giving. This takes us beyond them as God's instruments to God's very self, the ultimate source of that understanding and support which another human being communicates to us. The implication of the experience is that in the conversations, friendship, love and support, through which we grow and mature, the Holy Spirit of God is also present as the deeper dimension of the meetings and conversations which change us for the better. This is so true that we can truly speak of such people as *'godsends'* to us.

On this feast of Pentecost, then, let us give thanks to God for sending us the Holy Spirit day after day, the Spirit who comes to us whenever a friend or family member or some significant other says to us just what we need to hear, reaches out to us with their support and friendship, and in the process makes our lives so much more meaningful, joyful and fulfilling!

bgleesoncp@gmail.com