

Reflection for Pentecost Sunday

Speaking to Louis Theroux on the radio this week, Lenny Henry, the actor, and comedian, described how he ‘found his voice’ as a young comedian when he was struggling to make his way in the world. The impact of the racism directed against him or casually displayed, disfigured his formative years as an entertainer. It was sad and sobering to hear, as was his witness to the overt racism he still endures. But, find his voice he did and, I would argue, we are all immeasurably richer for it and I should say that overall, the programme was reflective and uplifting. The other programme that ‘caught my ear’ was the ‘Diary of a young naturalist’ by Dara McAnulty. He was reading excerpts from his diary giving expression to his love for nature. On the BBC home page, he describes his journey *“I was diagnosed with Asperger’s / autism aged five... By age seven I knew I was very different, I had got used to the isolation, my inability to break through into the world of talking about football or Minecraft was not tolerated. Then came the bullying. Nature became so much more than an escape; it became a life support system.”* I haven’t managed to listen to them all, but in the one I caught, his love for nature, his move to a new school without bullying and his environmental campaigning with other young activists were ‘given a voice’. Currently when we are marking the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter on the Environment, it seems to me that many people, especially younger people, are finding a voice on behalf of the natural world. I believe we will all be the better for having heard them.

In the account of Pentecost from the Acts of the Apostles, it states that *“they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech”*. The Apostles and those with them found their voice and were able to communicate to those who spoke different languages who had gathered for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The celebration of the Holy Spirit being sent on the Apostles is also a grace filled moment for us to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. This will, amongst other gifts, enable our voice of faith to be strengthened. The term ‘voice’ can be interpreted broadly. Certainly, our own individual expressions of faith but also the collective voice of the Church. Within our lives the first voice that needs to be given expression to is the voice of prayer. St. Paul writing to the Romans tells us that: *“The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our pleas in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God”*. We are on the threshold of a post lockdown Church and world and we may not be able to articulate clearly what our prayer should be, but we can ask the Holy Spirit to take our hopes and desires for a better world and to express our pleas according to the mind of God.

Prayer is first and the Apostles and others were gathered in the Upper Room in prayer when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. We know it was a powerful experience because in the verses that follow this account the Apostles are accused of being drunk *“Some, however, laughed it off. ‘They have been drinking too much new wine’ they said”*. Although it provoked others to ask questions about what this experience meant. Although we do not wish to appear to be under the influence of alcohol, with the voice of faith we too could inspire people to be open to the Holy Spirit. They may be if we let the Holy Spirit help us develop and strengthen our voice of faith. Our aim is to let the fruits of the Holy Spirit blossom. We have seen some of these fruits in last few difficult weeks: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We will need them still in the weeks to come.

God bless you, Canon David