

What God has done in Jesus is to restore the power of God's word to his people and to the world. Pentecost is the giving of a new law or rather giving God's law its true value as a living force among us. It's a word or a law to be understood by all people but the language of the law is still heard first in our own language, in the language we understand. How else could it be? So the Spirit is universal as God is universal, but its speaking is very particular, as are the Spirit's gifts, suited to particular people for a particular purpose, and always for the common good, the universal. What God is restoring to us then is the sanctification or sacralisation of all reality, the Spirit blows where God wills because all is subject to God. The disciples are amazed to hear everyone understanding and will be caught out again when others receive the Spirit even before they are baptised, even before they are caught once more in a formal, hierarchical manner of doing things and, occasionally, the bane of Church life interpreted only through law without spirit. Order, of course, is necessary and much of Paul's letters will be about discerning the work of the Spirit among his various churches as they tussle with this new freedom to interpret the law, to forgive or not to forgive. It's a terrifying freedom in one sense because it restores both individual and collective responsibility, that is, our own personal response to God, both as individuals and as church. It calls for a very close listening to what the Spirit is saying to each one of us as members of the one body, the one universal church. It's what the Synod is all about, not to be confused with democracy. There's a quality to this Spirit which one would like to see reflected in all but sadly is often not. It's the quality of love- that willingness to forgive for the greater good, for the common good, for the universal.

None of this takes away the hard work of living and loving where we are – that is, of discovering and allowing what is otherwise ordinary to reveal it's sacred character, to speak it's own language and yet to be understood by all. I'm thinking of the wonderful carvings on a Norman font in the parish church of St Mary in Burnham Deepdale on the north Norfolk coast, which celebrates each month of the year according to an appropriate activity, beginning with a man drinking in January, and warming his feet in February and then getting down to work in the rest of the year: digging, pruning, beating the bounds, weeding, scything, binding a sheaf, threshing, grinding corn in a quern, slaughtering and in December feasting at the common table. Beating the bounds may not sound like hard work but like drinking, warming ones feet and feasting is as sacred a part of the year as all the rest. I've put it round this way because we tend to see the church as a pyramid and the base as the less holy – all those common activities without which the church could not exist. No, all are needed and all are holy or potentially so when we allow the Spirit to give them their true value- the power of love which speaks to all human beings wherever and whoever they are.

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