

Romans 8: 14 to 17 – 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

Today is Pentecost the day that the Holy Spirit came upon his people nearly 2000 years ago and through God's grace we also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

St Paul wrote in Acts chapter 2 verses 38 and 39, "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him".

All those people, including us, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We have an account in the Old Testament in the book of Numbers chapter 11 of an instance which happened about 3500 years ago when the Israelites were wondering in the wilderness having just left Egypt.

The Israelites were complaining to Moses that they wished they were still back in Egypt where life was easier and more predictable, and Moses was at the end of his tether in trying to maintain law and order.

So Moses spoke frankly to God that he needed help and that it wasn't fair leaving everything to him; so God asked Moses to gather together 70 of the elders of Israel, and God passed on to them some of Moses Holy Spirit so that the 70 could take their share of the leadership of the people.

But it was reported to Moses that two men named Eldad and Medad on whom the spirit had also rested, and who were not of the 70, were also prophesying in the camp; and Joshua one of the 70 said, "My lord Moses, stop them".

But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake?" "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"

Well we know that 1500 years later on the day of Pentecost Moses' wish came true, and we heard about it in our reading today from Acts chapter 2.

And Acts chapter 2 was the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy in John 14:16 and 17 the last two verses of our gospel reading today when Jesus said that he would ask the Father and He will give you another advocate to be with you for ever.

And of course the new advocate was the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth, whom we are told, “The world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him”. But Jesus tells us that we know him, because he abides with us, and he is in us.

Jesus’ coming to us was a momentous turning point for the whole world, and so too was the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We also had a reading from St Paul’s letter to the Romans chapter 8 verses 14 to 17 which while very short nevertheless is very significant, and one of the key words in that reading is the word “adoption”.

Let me remind ourselves of the words, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption”.

But before we look at the word adoption I want to have a quick look at the word ‘led’ in St Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The word led does not mean guided by the spirit in decision making, but to be under the dominating influence of the Spirit of God, which we can access through prayer, the Holy Spirit is the wisdom of God and as Christians we are to try and obey him at all times.

Turning now to the word adoption; St Paul was a first century Roman citizen, and adoption in first century Rome was a serious and complicated step to take and to fully understand the depth of meaning in this passage, we need to understand what St Paul understood by the word adoption.

Adoption in Rome was always going to be very difficult because a father’s power and control over his family was absolute, and in the early days of the Roman Empire the father even had the power over life and death of family members.

In regard to his father a Roman son never came of age, no matter how old he was he was still under his father’s absolute power and control as long as his father lived.

Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one absolute power to another, and the process was in two parts.

The first part was a symbolic ritual of selling his son to his new father which was carried out three times and which had to be ratified legally before a magistrate.

The second part was the adopting father going to a magistrate and presenting a legal case for the adoption and when all this was done the adoption was complete.

But it was probably the consequences of adoption that St Paul had in mind when he wrote that passage to the Romans, there were four main points we need to know about adoption.

Firstly, the adopted person lost all rights to his old family, but gained all the rights of a legitimate son to his new family.

Secondly, he became heir to his new father's estate, and if there were other children adopted or born to his new father he became equal heirs with them.

Thirdly, if there were any debts associated with his old life they were all wiped out; in effect he was regarded as a new person entering into a new life, in effect he now had no past before his adoption.

And finally in the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father.

By way of illustration the Emperor Claudius adopted Nero in order that he might succeed him on the throne of Rome, which he did, and they were not related in any way before the adoption.

Also by way of complication Claudius had a daughter Octavia, and she and Nero fell in love and wanted to be married.

Now although they were not blood relations nevertheless they were now lawfully brother and sister so Claudius had to go to the Senate and get special legislation passed so that they could marry.

So you see when St Paul said that we have been adopted into the spirit of God he meant that our old life under the law of sin and death was all wiped out as if it never existed and that we had become true heirs of God.

That is why St Paul starts the passage at verse 14 with the words, "For all who are led, or as I've already explained, under the dominating influence of the Spirit of God, are children of God".

Now our old father who of course still exists for those who have not been adopted into the spirit of God is still on the prowl, but we are safe as St Paul intimates in that same passage when he wrote, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear".

In effect St Paul is saying that when you lived with your old father you were living as a slave and also in great fear, because your old father was the law and all the law

can do is criticize and condemn you when you get it wrong.

It is these people who our two archbishops have asked us to pray for, those who have no faith in the living God, and as is written in our May news letter, 'do not have hope of eternal life with Jesus'.

But in God's family where we live by the spirit and not under the law things are different, in God's family we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

And these, the fruits of the spirit, are the characteristics that we as Christians are asked, by our two archbishops, to demonstrate to those within our own families and close friends so that people will be able to see the love of God reflected in us

That's another reason why I enjoy being a Christian because I am a member of God's family where there is no criticism or condemnation; no wonder the Eucharist is also called a celebration, because we truly have something to celebrate living as we do in God's family.

Today all our readings deal with aspects of the Holy Spirit; in John 14 we heard Jesus promise that he would send us the Holy Spirit.

In our reading from Acts we heard how God gifted us the Holy Spirit, and in Romans chapter 8 we heard how we are to be under the dominating influence of the Holy Spirit.

But through adoption we are also heirs, and in verse 17 St Paul writes, "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; but we must share in his sufferings if we are also to share his glory".

So as the sons of God as God's children by adoption we must suffer with him before we can share in his glory.

It therefore follows that we can expect our journey of faith to be strewn with difficulties and dangers.

And when these trials come, and they most certainly will, and can range from the most trivial thing which just up sets us, to more serious illnesses and ultimately to the death of people we love.

But no matter what the trial we can all turn to our Father in heaven who loves us and who will comfort us and who will never let us down because we are his children under his absolute protection and love, so no matter what the trial we are to stay faithful to Christ.

Archbishops Prayer to end the Pentecost week of evangelism.