

Whitsun (Pentecost) 2004

Good morning!

Do you remember the first time, as a child, you went camping or sleeping outside on your own? I do!

It was summer and my father had got out his old two-man (well, it may have been big enough for two children, but it may not have held two adults!) tent and set it up in the back garden. We had played in the tent for much of the day and I can remember asking if we could sleep in it at night. Yes, we could! We were given a flashlight and were told we could come inside if we needed to. There was a block of bricks, part of a (former) gate-post if I recall correctly, placed under the back door-bell so we could ring the bell (my sister and I were too short to reach otherwise).

This was going to be fun! I had just started to read books such as the "Secret Seven" and I think I had read "Mr Galliano's Circus" (both by Enid Blyton). Sleeping outside under the stars was going to be so much fun.

It didn't get dark until very late. Britain was experimenting with being on Central European Time, so even at 10 o'clock at night it was still very light.

There were cows in the field which surrounded the back garden on two sides. There were hedgehogs and bird noises and... It was too much! Both my sister and I ended up inside the house before our parents had got to sleep themselves I think!

But it was an adventure and it was so much fun, but maybe it's better in a book! You need a big person close at hand in case there's any trouble – and a bed is some much more comfortable than sleeping on a ground sheet and in a kapok sleeping bag. The stars were pretty though – maybe it's the sort of thing that big people enjoy.

I don't know about you, but I haven't been camping for years. The last time I camped properly (in the middle of no-where and without even a tent) was in 1979. I've become too soft and with four children it's not easy being spontaneous about things.

Too soft. That's why, in some ways it's good to be forced to do things from time to time. Things that are good for us, but we won't do them because, "I don't have the time to-day", "Sorry, I've got to work this Sunday", "No I can't help, I can't get a baby-sitter", we are all really good at manufacturing excuses when there is something that we should do but it may cause us some discomfort. People make a fortune out of our discomfort. Look at all those exercise clubs, you pay a week's wage (or more) to join them – then you use them because if you don't it'll be money down the drain! It costs nothing to go for a brisk walk or do some gardening, but some people pay a fortune for the gym rather than do the work around the home!

God isn't like that, He doesn't set a timetable that's so obvious – we do it ourselves and make annual traditions and festivals. Of course, that doesn't mean to say that God doesn't appreciate them – He knows what it's like to be human after all!

But He does set timetables. Passover had a timetable, the Israelites in Egypt had to go by God's timetable and it was a very tight one. They then ended up sleeping outside for many years. Under the stars, in the desert, with the cattle and other animals making noises, out walking in the darkness – and no door bell to be let back inside – waiting for the light.

After leaving Egypt, God appeared to the Israelites on the sixth day of the sixth month.

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. ... Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him” (Exodus 19:16,18,19).

What was that? “The Lord descended on it in fire?” “...and a very loud trumpet blast..”
What day was it? The sixth day of the month following the month when they fled from Egypt – fifty days, Pentecost..

What happened on the day of Pentecost after God was crucified and rose again? The Holy Spirit descended upon them: “all together in one place...Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” The comforter had been sent to them, they had been enlightened and now were empowered and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, no longer walking in darkness but in the “light of life”.

With the Holy Spirit living in and through them, the disciples could do things they had never imagined possible. That very morning of Pentecost they were able to do as Christ had commanded and preached to all nations. How did they do this? By speaking in the languages understood by those visiting Jerusalem from many different lands.

“Speaking in tongues” is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is often talked about to-day and many see it as being one of the signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is so, but unfortunately, many of those outside the Church (especially those who are still “children”) believe that the gift of tongues is a major gift. But in truth, that is not really the case. Indeed, Saint Paul himself wrote: “...I had rather speak five words with my understanding ...than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue...”.

Saint Paul considered speaking in tongues to be one of the lesser gifts of the Holy Spirit, note the large difference “five words with understanding” than “ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Corinthians 14:19). This is a large difference in magnitude. But why did he chose five words, why not ten words? Surely ten words would have been a “rounder” way of emphasizing the importance. Ten as opposed to ten thousand? Why five words? Which five words?

ΚΥΡΙΕ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΕ, ΕΛΕΗΣΟΝ ΜΕ! (Kyrie Jesu Christe, Eleison Me!)

ГОСПОДИ, СПАСИ И СОХРАНИ МЯ! (Gospordi, sparci e sorchrani myah!)

LORD JESUS CHRIST, HAVE MERCY ON ME!

From the very earliest of Christian times, these five words (in Greek) were very important to those who were aiming to “pray constantly”(1 Thessalonians 5:17). If we read the writings of the Church Fathers we see passage after passage mentioning these words.

The constant repetition of these words brings the whole being into saying the prayer. A person who strives with this is on the early steps of acquiring the Holy Spirit and on the path of deification.

Once someone has acquired the Holy Spirit, He will impart to you – each in measure for that individual – His gifts. One who has the gifts of the Spirit will bear the fruits of the Spirit.

The disciples had acquired the Holy Spirit – the aim of the Christian life. It was after they had acquired the Holy Spirit that they bore in full the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

This Pentecost, let each of us re-commit ourselves to the path of theosis, bearing in mind the words of the Whitsun hymn.

*Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart:*

*Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love;
Enable with perpetual light
The dullness of our blinded sight.*

And inscribing in our hearts and minds the words of the Jesus prayer.

