

It's Easier to Cool a Fanatic than to Warm a Corpse!

Acts 2¹⁻²¹; Ezekiel 37¹⁻¹⁴; Psalm 104^{26-end}; Romans 8²²⁻²⁷; John 15²⁶⁻²⁷ 16⁴⁻¹⁵

*Can these bones live?
[Ezekiel 37³]*

The gift of the Holy Spirit has often been associated with the more eccentric excesses of the Christian Church.

The modern Pentecostal Movement owes its origins to Pastor Bill Seymore who, on the 9th April 1906, took Scripture literally and waited on God for the Holy Spirit and the evidence of that was (and is) for Pentecostals the ability to speak in tongues.

That was followed by the rather more refined Renewal Movement, where the emphasis was on the experience of God.

Eventually, with one or two other developments, at the end of the 20th century, we arrived at the Toronto Blessing, which like a virus, could only be passed on by contagion, and the expression of which was falling down, laughing and making animal noises. I was privileged, in 1994, to be at the first 'Toronto Blessing' meeting in London and what a strange thing that was to observe!

I thank God that I have lived through such a positive and exciting time in the life of the Church and, while some of it has been excessive, it is easier to cool a fanatic than to warm a corpse! God's Holy Spirit makes us more fully who were created to be who we are. But, often, in a dispirited Church, I am left wondering **can these [dry] bones live?**

Of course, they can! But the degree of life is entirely dependent on our openness and willingness to respond to what God's Holy Spirit will do today! What we can learn from the New Testament readings today, is what we might expect from the enlivening Spirit of God:

- ✘ Paul teaches us in Romans that the Spirit gives us **hope** and then that the **Spirit helps us in our weakness** and that, when we struggle to pray, **the**

Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

- ✘ Jesus reminds us that the Spirit is his gift, sent on his behalf from the Father. The Greek behind the word **Advocate** is fascinating: it is *παρακλητος*, a composite word literally meaning 'to call alongside'. This companion will affirm what we know about God and his action to save us. Jesus goes on to say that this Spirit will **guide [us] into all truth** and that **He will glorify me** – and this is the litmus test of the genuine Spirit, in that it draws the glory to Jesus and not to anyone or anything else: the Spirit doesn't make us look good or powerful, but Jesus glorious!
- ✘ Acts reminds us that, however fanatical we may appear to be when we are filled with God's Spirit – which is not an isolated event, but a continual experience – the Spirit does three specific things:
 - i) it empowers Peter **to raise his voice** and he reminds them this is what God had promised to do through the Prophet Joel;
 - ii) it makes sense of things rather than bringing confusion – **each one heard them speaking the native language of each**: as is often the case, it isn't what is said that is key, but what God makes people hear; and
 - iii) **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved**. 3000 were baptised and the Church was born.

When I looked at the readings, I mused on how much noise there would have been when Ezekiel heard the **rattling as the bones came together**. Or the noise in the Upper Room as the wind and fire filled the place, or indeed the noise of the commotion as the Apostles are launched into the public arena speaking in tongues as they did. But, whilst noise may be a sign of life, it is hope, truth, companionship, new disciples and Jesus glorified that is the authentic signature of the Holy Spirit.