

Pentecost Sermon

Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14, Acts 2 vv 1-21, John 15 vv 26&27

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect has traditionally been the opening of the Church of England Communion service since Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the reign of King Edward VI, son of Henry VIII. The thought is that we can only worship God if God inspires our worship. We are helpless without Him.

*O Lord open thou our lips
and our mouths shall show forth thy praise.*

Unless God opens our lips, we cannot praise Him. Moreover, we cannot come into the presence of God unless we are pure. That is why Roman Catholics traditionally went to Confession before receiving Communion. We come into God's presence as forgiven sinners. This is the reason why we should confess our sins to God before coming to Church, especially when we are coming to Holy Communion, and it is the reason why so many services begin with penitential material. Only the pure can come into the presence of God and only God can make anyone pure. All our righteousness is in Him.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:

God knows what we are like. He knows not only what we do and say, but He also knows what we are thinking all the time. He knows everything about us. He knows us through and through. There is, therefore, no point in trying to conceal anything from God. He knows what is wrong with us. So we might as well confess and repent.

The fact that God knows what is going on inside us might sound like a threat, except that God loves us so much. He knows what is best for us and He wants what is best for us. Sin spoils our lives. It alienates us from God. It alienates us from other people and destroys community. Sin can even alienate us from ourselves. What we need is for God to shine a torch into our lives so that all the dirt is revealed. Then, once it is revealed, it can be swept away. We can be washed clean. Set free from sin, we are free to be the people we are meant to be.

We should ask God to reveal our sins to us. We should ask Him for grace to repent. We should ask Him that we may know that we are forgiven. Only so can we be set truly free.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit:

There is more than sin, in the narrow sense, which needs the operation God's cleansing power in our hearts. There may be anxiety or fear. Perhaps we are weighed down with resentment or bitterness. Maybe we are very disappointed in people, or with life itself. Perhaps there is physical or mental illness. Maybe we cannot forgive others. There may be so much in our hearts spoiling our peace. We can be quite twisted up inside. We need the cleansing power of God's Holy Spirit. And so we pray for that power.

That we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name.

Cleansed by God we are set free, free to worship Him without fear. As St Augustine puts it, God has made us for Himself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him. Cleansed and healed by God, we are set free to worship Him and that means we are free to live lives of love for God and for other people. Our wholeness as people depends on God's healing power. So we come in prayer for healing and forgiveness for ourselves and for our friends, for the Church and for the world.