

**Sermon preached by the Dean of Hereford, the Very Revd. Michael Tavinor in Hereford Cathedral on the Feast of Pentecost, Sunday 12 June, 2011. The service included the baptism of James Watkins, an adult candidate.**

How things change! Truth to tell, I don't watch a great deal of television – I don't get a lot of time and there's not much on. But a few weeks ago, I did flop down in front of the telly, just switched on - and there was an extraordinary programme all about, if you please, the history of girls' magazines through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was fascinating! From the innocence of *Bunty*, with its jolly hockey sticks and midnight feasts in the dorm - to today when there's – well – *allsorts*. Apparently, we were told, there was a major change of direction in the late fifties, when some of the more progressive magazines like *Jackie* took to introducing – rather daringly - a full-colour centrespread of a male model, and, we were told, the first such daring example was of – wait for it – Prince Philip in full naval uniform! As I say, how times change!

I mention this, first, because Friday was the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Prince Philip - indeed, I think that today is the service of thanksgiving at Windsor. I'm sure we all join in wishing His Royal Highness continued health and happiness, but second, I rather relished, on this feast of Pentecost taking up the challenge of putting together a sermon which brought together the Duke of Edinburgh and the Holy Spirit! Can it be done, I ask myself? We could focus on the Pentecost theme of 'tongues – we heard in the first reading this morning [Acts 2] that the apostles spoke in outrageous and misunderstood tongues and, of course, Prince Philip hasn't always been known for biting his own particular tongue! But there is a rather more serious link, I reckon, and one with real spiritual import. Prince Philip has been a superb consort for over sixty years. He has *deferred* – to support the Queen – to enable *her* to shine – to be there – to have his own gifts, of course, but essentially, to enable *hers*. We can never know what this deferring – this enabling - has cost him, in human terms, but we must be hugely grateful that he has done it – surely, to the huge benefit of the Queen and of this realm.

Pentecost is all about gifts and receiving them. At every Confirmation, we tell candidates – 'the bishop will stretch out his hands over you and will call down upon you the seven fold gifts of the Spirit – wisdom and understanding, counsel and inward strength, knowledge, true godliness, fear of the Lord'.

Well, that's wonderful – but there can be a sense of grabbing all these Pentecostal gifts to ourselves. Another important gift that we should ask for, and receive, is that same 'consort's gift' of enabling and deferring – the ability and joy in seeing the gifts of others – the ability to give away for the sake of others. It's terribly unfashionable today when the absolute emphasis is on personal fulfilment – *my* gifts – *my* career – *my* fame.

The lovely icon in the Lady Chapel [of Hereford Cathedral] of Mary and Jesus says it all. Mary points to Jesus: 'look at *him* – *he* is the way, follow *him*'. Jesus points to Mary: '*she* is the one who can tell us of humility and obedience'. John the Baptist our own parish patron says much the same of Jesus: '*he* must increase – *I* must decrease'.

One of my favourite 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, Charles Williams, puts it well in that wonderful poem of his: *Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Guest*. Williams writes of a proud aristocrat who is invited to the King's banquet. All guests are requested to come in fancy dress – which, in the poem, is a symbol for putting on and celebrating the gifts of others. The aristocrat refuses – he's too proud. His own dress - his own gifts – are all he wants – or so he thinks. But fancy dress – putting on and celebrating the gifts of others – is what the king has decreed – and fancy dress alone gains admission to the ball – sporting just our own clothes doesn't. As Charles Williams puts it:

*No he or she was he or she  
merely; no single being dared  
except the Angels of the Guard,  
come without other kind of dress  
than his poor life had to profess.  
And yet those very robes were shown,  
when from preserval as his own  
into another's glory given  
bright ambiguities of heaven.*

Today, James is to be baptized – on Pentecost – the great day for baptism – Whit or White Sunday, when the baptized were clothed in their white garments. And we do indeed pray that James will be given gifts of the Spirit to sustain him in this his new Christian life – but we also pray that he will be given grace to see the wonderful gifts in others – to celebrate them – to see Christ in others – for this is all part of that great paradox which is our faith.

They're words of Jesus around the shrine of our patron saint, Ethelbert –  
*All who want to be followers of mine must renounce self.  
Day after day they must take up their cross and follow me.*

Or, in those wonderful words of the song I used to teach to the Sunday School, but which are also words as adult – and enduring - as you can get:

*Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.  
It's just like a magic penny, hold it tight and you won't have any.  
Give, it share it, you'll have so many,  
They'll roll all over the floor.*