

In Jesus we see the mint product: Spirit-filled humanity. The Divine become human. And with Jesus love is the one unmistakable characteristic; such complete love as the world has not seen before or after. The Counsellor is incarnate in the human Jesus. He is and must remain the one, dependable “blood test” for genuine, twenty first century spirituality.

I conclude today with a prayer from the sixth century:

*Counsellor, Spirit of Truth, you are present in all places and you fill all things. You are the treasury of goodness and the choirmaster of life. Come and live within us, cleanse us from all stains, rescue and make our spirits whole.*

**Amen!! Thanks be to God!!**

**PS. Catching the Wind of the Spirit**

If you were to go out on the water you have two types of boat you could use. You could use a powerboat. In a powerboat you have total control. You start the engine, head off in a straight line toward your destination, and get there very quickly. Alternately, you could get into a sailboat. Here you don't have total control. Rather you must identify which way the wind is blowing and set your sails to catch the wind. You probably won't be able to head straight to your destination but will need to zig zag across the bay. And the speed at which you move will be largely determined by the strength at which the breeze is blowing.

Although there is much about the speedboat that is attractive, living a life attuned to the Spirit is more like being in a sailboat, with the Spirit as the breeze or energy source. We need to identify what it is the Spirit is doing, then work in harmony with the Spirit to move forward. Very often we will not be heading in a straight line towards the goal, and the pace at which we move will be largely determined by the Spirit.

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*A Message from Mark!*

## **Bring on the Counsellor**

**23 May 2010 - Pentecost Day**

**Scripture: John 14: 8-17 & 25-27**

**Intro:** Once upon a time there was a minister who wanted to rent a holiday house in the country. The only house available was rumoured to be haunted but since the minister didn't believe in such things, she proceeded to rent it.

It wasn't long before the ghost appeared. The minister told her friends about the ghost, but they didn't believe her. They told her the only way they would believe was if she would take a picture of the ghost and show them the evidence.

The minister went home and called for the ghost. When it appeared, the minister explained the situation and asked the ghost if it would mind having its picture taken. The cooperative ghost agreed.

When the photograph was developed, the ghost wasn't at all visible. Feeling very disappointed, the minister called again for the ghost. When it appeared, the minister showed it the picture and wanted to know why the ghost wasn't in it. The ghost thought a minute and replied, *“Well, I guess the spirit was willing, but the flash was weak.”*

Friends, I hope you are both **willing** and **strong** this morning as we come to explore the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.

**COLLECT**      *God most wonderful, Friend most holy, you have fulfilled the Easter season by sending us your Holy Spirit. You have opened the window of opportunity to every race and nation on earth, and created out of dispirit elements the fellowship of the one universal church. Keep us, we pray, in the unity of the Spirit, that every tongue may tell and every life display the wonders of your love. Through Christ Jesus, who lives and loves with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God to be praised forever! Amen!*

***I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.*** John 14: 16-17a

***“They think they’ve swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all.”*** So spoke a frustrated Martin Luther about the sectarian Anabaptists of his day. For some reason, when it comes to belief about the Holy Spirit, we are in religious territory which has been marked by more extravagant behaviour than any other. And yet, at the same time, too many other Christians have been slavish and cautious where they should be free and daring in the liberty of the Spirit.

Maybe we’d find a better balance if we took our model of the Spirit filled person from Christ himself, rather than some of the colourful phenomena of the adolescent or contemporary church. Today I want to take up one of his ways of speaking about the Holy Spirit.

The word “Counsellor” is of course one attempt (RSV) to translate the Greek word *paraclete* into English. In the old King James Version it is translated “Comforter”. In the NRSV it is given as “Advocate”. In the GNB it is translated as “Helper”. I’m no big Greek scholar, but for what it’s worth I reckon the RSV got it pretty right with the flexibility of the word “Counsellor”. Let me come back to this.

First, the setting. Jesus spoke of the Paraclete at the last Supper. Jesus is comforting his distraught disciples who have finally got it into their thick heads that he is fair dinkum about being betrayed, tried and

Without this witness of the Counsellor, my ministry would be a wash out. And so would whatever pattern you have for serving Christ. I counsel someone, and the Spirit pleads my case. I preach a sermon - more inadequate words - but the Spirit pleads my case and sometimes what I offer hits the spot for you.

I write something for our magazine ‘LOGOS’ and it gets published but the only relevance it will have to our readers is if the Counsellor pleads (advocates) it’s truth in the mind and soul of the reader. I celebrate Communion at the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre on Friday; the only customer opens up about his personal troubles; I try to lead him towards the help he seems to need; but only the Spirit can intimately plead my case and make it real to him.

None of this is exotic or extravagant: The Spirit’s most common mode of action is silent and deep and steady. Like the profound love of a mother brooding over her family; the one incontrovertible sign of the Spirit is love.

This is not to say that the Counsellor doesn’t at times act dramatically and cause some excitement. The day of Pentecost witnesses to this kind of happening. The Spirit can come like wind and fire to shake the very foundations of our life. It can be very exciting or sometimes very frightening. For example, when the Spirit seizes our attention and thrusts us into a new task from which we would like to run away. The Paraclete can also in special moments lift us to great highs in prayer and praise and Christian fellowship.

However, the most common mode of action is in quietness, like the still waters that run deep. The most Spirit-filled people I’ve known haven’t been flamboyant, colourful characters, but quiet people who without a hint of drawing attention to themselves, radiate the love of Christ Jesus. They’ve lived so intimately with the Spirit that the ministry of the Spirit takes shape within them. They too are enablers and advocates. The Holy Counsellor creates more counsellors.

**1. I will try to tease out these meanings a little more, starting with the “Enabler” emphasis.**

The Holy Spirit, God intimately with us, helps us to cope well, to give of our best. The Enabler fosters our faith and assists us to turn what seems like road blocks into stepping stones. The Spirit helps us to reach towards the fullness of life as God’s children. The Spirit imbues (instils, fills, permeates) us with the love that will last the distance.

Maybe one aspect of this Enabler is neglected: toughness. A good counsellor will at times confront us, challenge our evasions, question our motives and allow us nowhere to hide from the hard truth. The Spirit is such a counsellor. When necessary, the Holy Spirit pursues us with relentless love. Do not for one moment think just of comforting, easygoing, sentimental kindness. In truth, there are times when it will feel as if the Paraclete is our beloved enemy.

**2. Then there is the other stream of meaning: the Counsellor as our Advocate.**

Some Christians see this as the Spirit pleading our cause before God. This thought works for them. That is fine; I’m not saying they’re wrong. But it does not work for me. I find that way of thinking puts a wedge between the Holy Spirit and God, as if they were separate entities, or at least not of the same mind. Whereas in fact the Holy Spirit is God intimately present with us.

What has been true in my experience is that the Counsellor speaks for me in my dealings with other people. If a seeker talks with me about the meaning of Christian faith, I attempt to explain it. But my words are just words unless something charges them with the spark of living truth. That something is in fact Someone: the Holy Spirit the Counsellor-Advocate. The Spirit, dealing directly Spirit to spirit with that other person, pleads my case.

crucified. Gathered around that table at night, under the flickering light of oil lamps, they are both frightened and beginning to grieve.

Jesus says: Don’t be upset. You won’t be alone. You’re losing my physical presence, you will not have me bodily walking beside you, counselling and encouraging you all the way. But God will give you a gift more permanent: the Counsellor, the Spirit of truth, who will be with you and in you. With this Spirit I will come to you, I will be in you, God will be in you, and love will be the sure sign of the Counsellor’s presence.

As it happens, in current English the word counsellor has two common meanings.

1. We use counsellor to describe a person who enables us to cope more wisely. It might be a financial counsellor, a marriage counsellor, a pastoral counsellor, a psychiatric counsellor, a family counsellor, or a close confidant and friend.
2. We may also use the word counsellor, for a person who gives us legal counsel and pleads our cause in court. As in Q.C.- a Queen’s Counsellor here in Australia. A Civic or Church Counsellor is one who represents the people, who stands in our place, makes decisions on our behalf and argues our case.

These usages take us close to the *paraclete* used in John’s Gospel. It can mean the enabler, the one who helps us to cope wisely and well. Thus, in the old Bibles we have the word “Comforter”, and in some later translations “Helper”. But *paraclete* can also be the legal counsellor, the legal advocate. Which is exactly why some translators give us: “Advocate”. The Advocate Spirit who speaks up for us.

For me therefore, “Counsellor” with its dual meaning takes us closest to the word *paraclete*. It is a double edged word. The Holy Spirit is both our **Enabler** and our **Advocate**, the one who enables us and when necessary, which is often, speaks for us.