

5<sup>th</sup> June 2022  
Romans 8; 12-27

## PENTECOST

### Abba!

Just so that all is clear from the very beginning. When I speak about Abba today, I am not referring to the Swedish musical group that became so famous, singing songs such as Chiquitita, Waterloo, or Dancing Queen. Much as I would love to start singing any of those. No, Abba is the way Jesus talks about God, when he is speaking of deep and intimate love.

The second thing I would like to mention is that given that most years the reading for Pentecost is that of Acts chapter 2, I would like us to embark on this reading of Paul to the church in Rome. And there is a deep reason – while Acts narrates a moment in history, we run the risk of leaving it exactly there – in history, and in no way connecting to our lives today: we don't really favour speaking in languages if there is no one to interpret (well done Paul at pointing this out!), though we might benefit from the courage to open the doors and meet the people. I chose the reading from Romans because it clearly cannot be anchored in the past, it speaks to us here, today, now. And that can be more uncomfortable than simply a history lesson, one we cannot forget soon after we get home.

**Abba** – is an Aramaic word, and Aramaic was the language Jesus and his people spoke. As somebody once said, it was the language of the heart, not the language of the brain. And Abba is the loving way children called their Father... When you were children how did you address your Father? .... In my case it was always “Daddy”, which is what Abba would be translated as, today it would be Dad. Whatever the word it is important to remember that it should be a term of deep affection, never a word of formality, distance or authority. The word with which Jesus begins the Lord's Prayer, and that Paul uses here in the letter to the Romans.

When Paul writes to the early Christians in Rome, this whole chapter 8 of the letter is a description of *life in the Spirit* – “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death*” (Rom 8;2). By action of the Spirit we are new, free from the constraints of the law of sin and of death, and this newness is expressed in the most affectionate of ways: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God* (Rom 8;14), and this is the wonderful reality of Pentecost – we are children of God; yes, the whole wide variety of people with all our different characteristics and ways and forms.

As God's children we are known for our distinct ways of being – the variety of languages, of ways of praying, of worshiping, our race, our gender orientation, our forms of living worship – more charismatic or more subdued, noisier, or totally silent. Yes quite different, but through the gift of the Spirit ... we all have one thing in common -*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ* (Rom 8; 15-17). Yes – God is our “Daddy”, our “Dad”. This closeness with God really upset the Pharisees, who could not accept such talk.

What Paul wants us to grasp is that because of the Spirit doing what the Spirit does, we have in common the oneness of saying Abba!, and this makes us God's children. And this is what Jesus also meant when teaching the disciples to pray – Abba. This is the centre of our

celebrating communion – none of us is the host -only Jesus is, we are all guests. We become too accustomed to the fact we mostly seem to look alike, but we are different, we think differently, and yet we are all loved by God, and we can all come together when we call out Abba. How does it sound?

On the count of 3, let us all say aloud **Abba**, coming from the heart...

This is a gift of the Spirit. This is the Pentecost effect, not only the understanding of languages, not only the courage of those in fear to come out and face others, but our common relationship to Abba, and in consequence, our relationship to each other – here and now, but also with all people the world around who by the gift of the Spirit call out to God, even when we don't know how to call out, even when our words don't seem to make much sense, we believe that for all of us *The Spirit intercedes for us*. (Romans 8; 26).

This has profound effects on life in the world as it is today:

- We call out Abba
- This makes us children of God
- We are not indifferent to the needs and struggles of the children of God
- The Spirit intercedes for us (all) and takes our differences and presents them to God

Pentecost is the continuous reminder that our faith is based on our differences, and that those differences make us one with Abba. To whom be the glory for ever. Amen.