

FR ALAN'S REFLECTION

OUTWARD FOCUS

In 1990 I went to Philadelphia, USA for ten months to do my Spiritual Year with the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers over there. In the first half of that year the focus of the Programme, was on classes, study, and prayer. Some time was put aside for pastoral work and pastoral reflection. In the second half of the year the focus of the programme changed where a lot more time was spent doing pastoral work and pastoral reflection. I had the feeling at that time of being sent out. I was told that the first half of the year was for that purpose: a time of preparation for moving outwards.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. In both the First Reading and the Gospel we hear the how the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. In the Gospel we hear at the time of this occurring, they were all together behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. In the First Reading we hear how having had received the Holy Spirit, they moved out. Their time with Jesus when he was here on earth was a time of preparation for the day when they would go out and do what he did. The Holy Spirit changed their lives. In the Responsorial Psalm for today we hear the words, 'Lord send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.' This was what the disciples did. They went out and renewed the face of the earth by telling everyone about the life, work, and mission of Jesus Christ.

As people of faith who have received the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments this is our work too. We are told that if we do this, we will have the Holy Spirit working in us. How can we be sure of this since we cannot see the Holy Spirit? The Gospel reading from Monday of the Second week of Easter reminds us that the Spirit blows wherever it pleases... (John 3:8). However, whilst we cannot see the Holy Spirit, we can know that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. I would like to suggest three ways we can do this. In each case they are all focused outwards.

Firstly, if the Holy Spirit is working in us it will show up as love. Love is to want the good of the other and to do something about it. Love is breaking out of ourselves and living for the other. If we are acting like that then we can be sure that the Holy Spirit is breathing through us. A simple question to ask ourselves: What is our attitude when we get up in the morning? Is it about what we can get out of today? Or is it about looking for opportunities to love another person? The fact that the people could hear the disciples preaching to them in their own language tells us a profound theological truth: love is the common denominator which is understood in every language.

Secondly, if the Holy Spirit is working in us, we will be people of peace. We hear in the Gospel Jesus say to his apostles twice, 'Peace be with you.' It is about the connection of our soul at the deepest level to the Spirit of God. What that gives is a peace and serenity, a harmony that can endure any of the changes in our lives and this transcends whether we are in a good place psychologically or not, whether we are healthy or sick or whether we are successful or not. It was receiving and accepting Jesus' message of peace that enabled the

disciples to move beyond the closed doors and face the same people that they had been afraid to face before. The Holy Spirit gave them strength.

Thirdly, if the Holy Spirit is working in us, we will be people who seek to work in harmony with others. The Second Reading reminds us that we are all to place and use our gifts for the service of the community so that the mission that Jesus Christ started is continued. This may mean having to put aside our own needs, our own projects, and our own plans to achieve this. We do not negotiate our relationship with God individually. Striving to work together as one makes us powerful.

In the Second Reading St Paul says, "No one can say "Jesus is Lord unless they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit.' In other words, if our lives are not outward focused and we close in on ourselves then prayer and any other spiritual practice we may care to take on loses its meaning.

On this Feast Day of Pentecost, we are invited to ask ourselves the following questions: Where do we need the Holy Spirit to transform us? Where do we need the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and burn away those areas where we are prone to focus on ourselves and lose sight of others? In what areas of our lives do we need to set on fire, both individually and as a Church? Where do we need to work together so that our God's desire that the face of the earth be renewed is realized?