

PENTECOST YEAR A 2020

Acts 2:1-11

1Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

John 20:19-2

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

Pentecost is a great day in the Church's life. It is a celebration of Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to each of the baptized.

This weekend we recall the powerful events in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost Sunday. Before then, the disciples were frightened, hiding behind locked doors. In the Gospel today, the risen Christ appears to his disciples, shows them his wounds (these serve to identify him as the same one who died), and bestows peace on them. Then he entrusts his mission to them. This mission is the exact same mission he received from the Father: the reconciliation of people with the Father through the forgiveness of sins. To carry out their mission he gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sin.

On Pentecost, the doors were opened, Jesus empowered the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. They received the Holy Spirit in a drama of wind and fire. Wind and fire are symbols of power. Wind has the power to move. Fire has a power to refine and transform, the power they symbolise here is the power of God. The Holy Spirit provided the Apostles with the energy, the courage, the love and the passion to get on with the task Christ had given them. Yet, even though the Holy Spirit would help them, he wouldn't do it for them. After the coming of the Holy Spirit the Apostles were changed men. They came out of their shell. They are suddenly unified by mission and purpose. They became confident and courageous. This is the real miracle of Pentecost.

We too need someone to empower us so that we are able to take charge of our lives, and live them responsibly. This means being willing to change what needs to be changed. But we especially need empowerment in order to witness to our Christian faith. The power that changed the Apostles is available to us too. Prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit the Apostles were hiding in the upper room. Afterwards, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they left the upper room, and set out courageously to preach the Gospel. Even though the launch of the Church is described in very dramatic terms, in reality it began very simply. The Church was born in frailty and weakness. It had no property, no buildings, and no money. Its only resource was people, and there weren't many of them. As they waited for the Holy Spirit, they were all able to fit into one room. The Church should never forget its humble origins.

We should remember that the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost in Jerusalem still remains within the Church today. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit that launched the Church. Though small in numbers, thanks to the coming of the Holy Spirit, they were strong in spirit, and united in prayer and charity. The Church is sustained, not by organisational structures and membership statistics, but by the quality of its members.

We need to experience the Church as small. We need to belong to a specific community. We need a sense of closeness and of belonging, a sense of interdependence and of mutual service, such as Paul talks about: "Our faith is nourished at a local level" (see Second Reading).

Therefore our church, the local one, is very important to nourish our faith. We have the Holy Spirit all times. The Holy Spirit was not given just for one time and one place. The Holy Spirit abides within us. The Holy Spirit is present in the Church as a whole – guiding it and the Holy Spirit is present in each member; we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19). It is the Holy Spirit who binds us together in a community of love and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to witness to Christ in the world.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, Catholic Church services have been suspended. In the recent easing of restrictions for community gatherings for religious purposes by the Victorian Government has offered the opportunity for Mass to be celebrated with very strict limits of 10 people at one time. This means we cannot celebrate the feast of Pentecost publicly in our churches this year. However, as the words in the letter of encouragement to the Catholic people of Australia from the Bishops of Australia state, “Even when our doors are closed, our hearts are still open. The churches may not yet be fully open, but the heart of the Church, which is the heart of Christ, is wide open. The celebration of Mass has never ceased. Though we, your priests, cannot yet offer Mass with the people, we are still offering Mass day by day for the people – for all of you...”, the parishioners of St Mary’s, St Peter’s, Sacred Heart, and St Thomas the Apostle parishes. The doors of our churches are closed, however, we can open our hearts to welcome the Holy Spirit because no locked door can keep Him out; He is everywhere, even in this time of distress.”

In the second reading today St. Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit is given to the Church and to each individual Christian as well. This Holy Spirit is at work deep inside us, taking the broken parts of us and putting them in order and unifying all our talents in a Christ ward direction. The Holy Spirit is our living connection to Christ.

There are three important things which we should remember on the feast of Pentecost:

Firstly, the feast of Pentecost reminds us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not limited to Old Testament prophets and Church leaders. It is given to all of us in Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is present not just in dramatic moments, in tongues of fire, but whenever we manifest courage in living the Gospel, when we open our heart in prayer, when we reach out to another, when we make wise choices, when we appreciate the magnificence of God’s presence, when we deepen our knowledge of the Lord. We probably memorized these ordinary gifts for our Confirmation: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude and fear of the Lord. The Holy Spirit really is, as we say in the Creed, the Lord and Giver of life to the Church and to our soul.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit is for every life and for every age a source of renewal. Over and over, people have found their lives in a rut, at a dead end, and as they turn to the Holy Spirit, new avenues open, their vision is restored, they receive the courage they need to make a new start as they are renewed in the Lord.

Dear sisters and brothers, Pentecost is not just about history. Deep inside us from our Baptism and Confirmation we received a gift from Jesus, the fulfilment and harvest of Easter. To find God, we don’t have to travel great distances. The Holy Spirit of God is with us; “in our heart He takes up His rest.” To renew our lives, we don’t have to read many books but we do have to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, the deep down freshness that resides in each of us.

Conclusion: The disciples of Jesus were transformed when they received the Holy Spirit. They burst open the doors of the upper room, which they had locked in fear, and boldly proclaimed the Good News. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts this Pentecost giving us the courage to break down the walls we have built around ourselves. May the Holy Spirit free us to proclaim the peace, joy and forgiveness of God to everyone. Amen.

Happy Feast Day, Pentecost, Birthday of the Church!

May Almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you and be with you and your family always!

Fr Tao Pham