

Homily for Pentecost Sunday 2022 Year C

Today, the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the birthday of the Church.

The Gospel paints a very vivid picture of the spectacular beginnings of an active missionary community. In an enormous burst of spiritual energy, wind and fire, the Holy Spirit transforms the lives of the grieving, timid Apostles in the upper room into men brimming over with confidence and enthusiasm.

There is no holding them back, each one begins to preach and no matter what the mother tongue of the listener, they can understand perfectly what each Apostle is saying as language ceases to be a barrier.

And so, the Church begins. In this energetic explosion of spiritual power, the Apostles are united; they have that unity which Christ prayed for; a clear purpose and one Gospel that falls upon the eager ears of all who hear it.

But time and human frailty can have a destructive effect upon all that bright enthusiasm. Two thousand years have seen some radical and negative distortions of that original vision. History shows us that Christians have erected fierce divisions between each other in matters of belief and practice. They have been guilty of the torture and murder of all who would not accept their beliefs. They have imposed those beliefs through political force or terror upon others. They have distorted or destroyed other cultures to expand the Christian faith and of course there have always been those who tried to cynically manipulate the word of God to further their own ends.

And all of this was done, sometimes, with the sincerest of intentions, to fulfil the will of God; a sincerity which today we would call blind fanaticism - and for all that, mankind has much to be ashamed of.

But now, look on the other hand, - history shows us the awesome courage, in every century, of those prepared to suffer and even to die for their faith. It shows how the warmth of that Christian love melts the ice of barbarism and contributes in no small way to the spread of civilisation throughout the world. It provided the inspiration for the greatest intellects and the most gifted artists and composers to explore and then share their insights into the mystery of God with their fellow men. It motivated human beings not only to die for love of their fellow men but also to live and work for them in the areas of medical care and education. It challenged and raised the lives of countless numbers of

people to heroic sanctity and union with God; not just those whom the Church canonised, but those myriads of individuals in every generation and every walk of life known only to God.

And so we could go on

What a difference - what is it that makes this enormous difference between the negative and positive aspects of religion. Between Sin and Grace. Between what is worthless and what is worthy in God's sight. Between what passes and what endures forever.

The answer is the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit that breathes life and health, Love and Peace, Joy, Wisdom, and Sanctity. The Spirit that transforms all human endeavour and activity into something pleasing to God. The Spirit that is God's abiding presence with us, transforming fear into great faith, selfishness into great love and raising man's heart and mind in prayer to heights that alone he would be incapable of.

Take God's Spirit away, the wind, the breath, the fire in our lives and we die - all our enterprises come to nothing.

But God will not take His Spirit away, it is a continual gift which was there at the birth of the Church. We each received it in Baptism and then continuously through the Sacraments. It comes to us in the day-to-day activities of our lives but more and more there is a desperate need that, we not only open ourselves up to the workings of the Holy Spirit, but that we try to be more aware of His presence and the possible effect it can have on our lives - that we pray to Him. There is no more beautiful prayer to the Holy Spirit than the Sequence to today's Mass. It is one of the oldest prayers in the history of the Church and really says it all.

Say it now ...

*Holy Spirit, Lord of light,
From the clear celestial height,
Thy pure beaming radiance give.*

*Come thou Father of the poor,
Come with treasures which endure,
Come thou light of all that live.*

*Thou of all consolers best,
Thou the soul's delightful guest
Does refreshing peace bestow.*

*Thou in toil art comfort sweet,
Pleasant coolness in the heat,
Solace in the midst of woe.*

*Light immortal, light divine,
Visit thou these hearts of thine
And our in-most being fill.*

*If thou take thy grace away,
Nothing pure in man can stay
All his good turned to ill.*

*Heal our wounds, our strengths renew.
On our dryness pour thy dew.
Wash the stains of guilt away.*

*Bend the stubborn heart and will.
Melt the frozen, warm the chill.
Guide the steps that go astray.*

*Thou on us who evermore
Thee confess and thee adore,
With thy sevenfold gifts descend.*

*Give us comfort when we die,
Give us life with thee on high
Give us joys which never end.*