

Pentecost Sunday (A)

4th June 2017

'If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire!'

Ezek 37: *dry bones live!* or Acts 2: Pentecost day

Ps 103: *Send forth Your Spirit O Lord and renew the face of the earth*

Rom 8: *Spirit comes to help us in our weakness,* or 1Cor 12: *variety of gifts*

Jn 7: *come and drink who believes in me!* or Jn 20: *receive the Holy Spirit!*

Sometimes we call the event of Pentecost the 'birthday of the Church.' The Church was born in the outpouring of Holy Spirit on the assembled apostles. Immediately they stepped out of hiding in the upper room and were full of understanding and courage to proclaim the Gospel. The Church came out into the open and was born, rather as a baby comes from the dark and protection of his/her mother's womb, and into the daylight. On Pentecost Day, the Church came forth to begin its life.

A 'birthday' reminds me of birthday cake and the traditional custom of blowing out candles! I remember once at my birthday in Rome when a friend had acquired those trick candles which manage to re-light. Well, the birthday of the Church is certainly not about blowing out the light. It's much more about a flame which refuses to go out, and which re-lights again and again: the light of Christ which never dies.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles as a great wind and as flames of fire settling on their heads. Once alight with the Spirit, they were never extinguished. From Jerusalem they spread in all directions, taking the Gospel outwards — all around the Mediterranean Sea; and to Asia, North Africa, the near parts of Europe — and most of the apostles in the end were martyred for their love of Jesus. That's how 'on fire' they remained after their spiritual anointing at Pentecost.

No doubt, we want that same powerful, lifelong, experience of the Holy Spirit. But we also know the difficulty of keeping the flame of faith shining brightly. If we think of trying to keep a candle lit outdoors: the slightest wind can blow out the precarious flame. The same with this flame of faith which the Spirit gives us. Sometimes we can be tempted to try and hide away our flame to protect it. Outside the Church we can feel some dreadful gusts: money, bullishness, showiness, vulgarity and immorality. Things which shake our faith and can momentarily extinguish our flame. But the faith is not for hiding away,

keeping private, despite the things which buffet us. The faith is for taking out, just as the apostles did from that Pentecost day onwards. They have shown us that we can take that flame of faith into the world.

In fact, the Holy Spirit is also a wind, and can fan the flame faith and set others on fire. So we must go out and about as if our flame is lit, as if there were a flame of faith alight on our heads. Firm in our faith; rooted in our prayer; faithful to our Christian morals. We can't give light and warmth to others, or set them on fire for God if we are not alight ourselves, and show them so. St Catherine of Siena, a feisty young woman of the middle ages, is reputed to have said: "If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire." That's just what the Apostles did. By being Christians, by not hiding their flame, by not suppressing the work of the Holy Spirit, by being who they were supposed to be, they set the world on fire.

Let's not underestimate the power of the Spirit. Let's not say, "Oh that was for them," or, "that's for other people, more holy than me ..." No, the Holy Spirit's gifts are for

the whole of Christ's people! Pray for His power to be at work in your lives! Pray for Him to come into your heart, make you a faithful, committed, brave, and persevering Catholic believer! These are not things that are restricted to the very few! Christ wants His whole people to be a people animated by the Holy Spirit, alive in prayer and grace, aglow with the flame of faith. *We can* be! *We can* be holy, if we really surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit.

Let's hear again some of those beautiful words of the Pentecost Sequence, addressed to God the Holy Spirit:

If Thou take Thy grace away,
Nothing pure in man will stay;
All his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength 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. ...

Give us comfort when we die;
Give us life with Thee on high;
Give us joys that never end.