

Pentecost 2024

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Pentecost, as we mark the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the disciples of Jesus, after which they burst open the doors of the upper room, which they had locked in fear, and boldly proclaimed the Good news. Let us pray that as we celebrate Pentecost today, the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with strong faith give us the courage to break down the walls we have built around ourselves, and make us proclaimers and witnesses of God's unchanging Truth, deep Peace, infectious Joy, and healing forgiveness to all we meet.

The Word Pentecost means fiftieth in Greek, and thus is celebrated 50 days after Easter and completes our Easter Season, the culmination of the Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle. Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival which was celebrated fifty days after the feast of the Passover. It was one of the great 'pilgrimage' festivals which meant that so many pilgrims were present in Jerusalem on the day when the Spirit was manifested in the lives of the disciples.

The account of this in today's first reading (Acts 2:1-11) concludes with a list of people from many regions who hear the testimony of the apostles each in their own language. The nationalities refer, in the first instance, to pilgrims from the Jewish Diaspora. They also foreshadow the universal mission of the Church, which is now being empowered and equipped for its mission to be a light to the nations.

It is St. Luke, in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, who has located the imparting of the Spirit on the Church on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Whereas St. John does not have a specific day to mark the coming of the Spirit of God, but as we heard in the Gospel today Jesus does breathe on his disciples the breath of God and invite them to receive the Holy Spirit.

"After saying this he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit', unlike Luke, John does not refer to any physical manifestations or charismatic gifts of the coming of the Spirit. This is an important observation. One evangelist gives us an account of the tangible and physical manifestations of the coming of the Holy Spirit but the other is more subtle in his account of the coming of the Spirit. We know both are true and valid; at times the coming of the Spirit is very gentle and subtle and it happens over time as we grow and mature in our faith; at other times, the Holy Spirit can come with a rushing wind and flames of fire as it were, we

could have a tangible encounter with the Spirit of God, where we can discern the presence of the Holy Spirit.

As many of you know I grew up a Roman Catholic and I was baptised as a baby. I was taught Catholicism every day in religion class at school and was confirmed when I was about 15, after a very thorough preparation. I can't remember missing a Sunday mass growing up and I always believed. However, until I came in touch with the Missionaries of God's Love, a Catholic Charismatic Religious group, in my early 20s I had a very limited knowledge of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. The missionaries introduced me to more explicit and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. As we heard in our second reading today

– "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gift of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kind of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues"

I used to believe performing miracles, healing services, prophecies, praying in tongues, and interpreting tongues are not Catholic but Pentecostal! That's what the happy clappers do in AOG churches since I had never heard anyone pray in tongues or interpret tongues, give a prophetic word, or even be healed at Church. While I believed in miracles I never expected them to happen.

In 2007/08 I was exposed to some of these extraordinary gifts in various Charismatic circles and I was truly surprised and excited, to know that the Holy Spirit is not only a concept, not only the third person in the Trinity, and the love between the Father and the Son, but a real person whom we could encounter, a tangible presence, a power that can be experienced and encountered, and he is available to those who are open and thirsty for him. I remember going to a healing service one night in Glen Waverly and witnessing the physical healing of many people, including someone who was able to walk and came in a wheelchair! – So miracles do happen and I began to believe anything is possible with God.

I further discovered, that the presence of the Holy Spirit in all his gifts – that both ordinary and extraordinary spiritual gifts have always been part of the Catholic Church, even though gone underground at times. At times there is a struggle between the institutional and

the more charismatic aspects of the church, for various reasons, which I will not go into today. Nevertheless, the fullness of the Spirit of God is always open to us.

The modern Pentecostal movement started at the beginning of the 20th Century with the Azusa Street revival in the USA and now of course has spread throughout the whole world and into most nations of the world. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal started within the Roman Church after the Second Vatican Council with millions experiencing their faith strengthened in this rediscovered power of the Holy Spirit. By pouring the Holy Spirit upon millions of Christians in our world God is reminding the whole Church an important reality – without the Holy Spirit we are not empowered as a Church. While the intellectual tradition, institutional structures of the church, sacraments, and rituals are gifts of God to his Church, they are brought to life only through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit faith can be powerfully experienced and encountered. I remember, when the Healing Minister blessed me at the Healing Service in Glen Waverly I went down physically as I felt the power of God come upon me so gently but powerfully – for a minute I thought I had died and gone to heaven, given the amazing presence and the weight of the Spirit - God is truly real.

Coming to faith is not so much acquiring a new set of beliefs about God as it is discovering God's love and presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit help us to be more attuned to the actions of God in our lives.

Pentecost is not an event of the past, by a reality that occurs every day in the life of the Church. God has not stopped sending his Spirit but continually pours his Spirit upon his Children. To be filled with the Spirit of God is to be filled with the love that eternally flows between the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity, a love that changes us at our deepest level, and makes us love God in return. The Holy Spirit empowers us to put on the 'Mind of Christ' to think like him and love like him, and thus do the works he did (John 14:12).

Next Saturday, the Alpha group participants will have a day retreat focusing on the Holy Spirit. There will be an opportunity for them to be prayed with for an infilling of the Holy Spirit once again. Keep us in your prayers for a powerful encounter with the Spirit of God.

Let us also rediscover the power of the Holy Spirit and thirst for his presence. Let us ask for the gifts, and the fruits of the Spirit for our sanctification and the more extraordinary, charismatic gifts for evangelization and spreading of the Gospel. Would like to finish with this

quote from St. Augustine as he discovered the beauty and power of God and his Spirit late in his life

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness, I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace."

— *Saint Augustine of Hippo*

Come Holy Spirit to touch and burn each of us with your love. Amen