

## **Pentecost**

Many of us took the opportunity to watch the Installation of our new Archbishop, Patrick Michael O'Regan. We were probably noticing his very animated way of speaking while trying to work out what kind of a man he was. We probably didn't hear everything he said because of that. But the image of the Archangel Gabriel tapping Mary on the shoulder at the moment when she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit may have stayed with us. Archbishop O'Regan spoke a lot about the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit upon each one of us, preparing us for today's Feast of Pentecost.

The readings chosen for today describe two different moments when the Holy Spirit came down upon the first disciples of Jesus. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles tells us what happened on Pentecost day, a Jewish feast that was held some fifty days after the Passover. We are told that the disciples were all together in one room. No social distancing rules applied. There was a noisy and powerful wind from heaven. Something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire which separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. We are told that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Nobody missed out. The Spirit then gave them the gift to be able to speak about Jesus in a way that everybody could hear and understand them.

It is a wonderful new beginning for the disciples of Jesus who are being formed into the Church, the new people of God. Luke is probably wanting us to remember the story in the Book of Genesis when the tower of Babel was being built and people could no longer work together because they were divided into language groups who could no longer understand each other. Here was the Spirit allowing everyone to hear the message of Jesus and so bring everyone into one people again. Luke was also wanting us to remember that wonderful moment when God shared his Spirit with Moses and the 80 elders.

But language is a two-sided coin. No matter what good things people might be saying their words are wasted unless we are committed to listening to them. One of the greatest gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of an attentive ear. We may have noticed that our new Archbishop has not come to us with a great plan for the Diocese. He wants time to listen to us and get to know who we are before he can lead us well.

The gospel story tells us of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the evening of the Resurrection. John doesn't talk about how many disciples were there. He wants you and I to feel that we are among their number. Jesus greets us with the gift of peace. He fulfils the

promise he made on Holy Thursday that he would give us a peace that the world cannot give. That peace can only come from knowing that Jesus is with us. Jesus then breathes his own Spirit into us and sends us out as agents of reconciliation, continuing the work that Jesus had begun. “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.” If we needed to sum up what the Church can offer the world, we find it in those two words, peace and forgiveness. We can only offer those gifts when we have found our peace in Jesus and we have accepted the forgiveness that Jesus so readily offers to each one of us.

If we think that this is beyond us, we can look again at today’s letter from St. Paul. He tells us first that we can claim to be disciples of Jesus only because of the work of the Holy Spirit within us. “Nobody can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit” But then he goes on to tell us that this Spirit gifts us in so many different ways. The different ways in which the Spirit gifts us is given for the sake of the community. We need each other to live well. None of us have all the gifts of the Spirit, but each one of us has some of those gifts. It is when we are ready to generously share them with one another that we make the Body of Christ powerfully present in our world today.

Our time of being isolated from one another has limited some of the ways that we could give and receive those gifts. We have missed the opportunity to work together as volunteers at Vinnies. We missed the chance to experience the hospitality of others over a cuppa or a meal. We have missed being able to pray with one another and serve the community through the ministries that we accept. We have been very limited in the ways that we could visit or take Holy Communion to the elderly and the sick.

I think we have come to understand more clearly that being Church is much more than having a good relationship with God. Being Church is also about having a good relationship with those who share our faith and with them allowing the Holy Spirit to reach out through us to all who need us. It is only in our giving that we discover how much we have received from the God who loves us. It is only in using the gifts that the Spirit has given to us that we discover their richness. Mary allowed the Holy Spirit to overshadow her so that Jesus could come among us. Let us ask her to pray for us that we too may welcome the Spirit deep into our hearts this Pentecost Sunday and so allow Jesus to come among us again.