

PENTECOST SUNDAY YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020

COME HOLY SPIRIT OF LIGHT AND LIFE AND LOVE

Jn 20.19-23 Acts 1.1-11 1Cor 12.3-13 (Rhyme Bible 'Good News')

Welcome now to our virtual celebration of Pentecost, as 49 days have passed since Easter and 74 days since the pandemic shutdown in Australia. There has been a gradual return to school this last week, with Prep to grade 2 in primary and Years 11 and 12 in secondary schools, with opening up of services in the broader community, but I believe we are not yet ready for church opening, due to ongoing and sensible requirements for physical distancing and limited numbers, and the potential for confusion and division about who is in and who is out! Meanwhile, I hope that our virtual Mass celebrations do provide some sense of connectedness and ongoing belonging to our active worshipping parish community.

Remember, also, that we all need to continue to be sensible, maintaining physical distancing, careful hygiene, being generally cautious and attentive to wise and informed community and personal advice.

One thing about the Spirit we celebrate at this time, is its elusiveness and ubiquity, uncontainable and surprising, wherever it pops up. We talk about a spirit of joy or hope or enthusiasm for life, normally in positive terms, but there can also be a spirit of sadness and even hopelessness or despair at times, when we feel we are in a dark place and somewhat lost. The Holy Spirit, imparted by Jesus, assures us of his enduring presence and the requirement for us to recognize that Spirit and respond to it in our own lives.

On Friday, I went to school and talked to each class about the happiness, joy and excitement of being back together with friends and teachers face to face, after a few months of on-line communication, with which our teachers and assistants and parents have done a great job in challenging and changing circumstances. They were full of life, enthusiasm and humour, seeming relatively unaffected in any adverse way, by the new experience they have just been through with being at home and not able to pursue their normal activities, sport, music, dancing and whatever else, outside home. *(And for a bit of entertainment, I read them a most boring book: "The Book with No Pictures", by PJ Novak, which they thought was amusing, anyway!)*

This reminded me that, as adults, I think most of us can look back to the simpler, more innocent days of childhood with a degree of nostalgia, even regret, wishing for the perhaps easier times when we had the security of loving and supportive parents and carers in families, without having to worry too much about the problems of being independent and looking after ourselves in the broader world. But isn't that a part of growing up and taking responsibility for ourselves and making our own considered and conscientious decisions about our own lives, loves, friendships, pursuits, interests and directions?

For those of us of faith, to which John's Gospel calls us, it is the Spirit bestowed by Jesus, who guides us along our paths of life, but requiring us to respond to the gifts of the Spirit and to produce the good fruits by our words and actions as we live our lives and face up to the challenges, successes and failures, joys and sorrows that are all a part of our picture, individually and collectively.

Local Jesuit priest, Andrew Hamilton (*whose medical GP father delivered me and my 4 younger siblings at Bethlehem Hospital in Caulfield!*), speaks of things not being fixed up or resolved all at once, but of life moving on in stages, as with now, as we move slowly, but hopefully forward, through this coronavirus period: *"The rhythms of God's work and our response correspond to the rhythms of our restricted life now, always lived with gratitude for God's goodness and hope of God's freedom."* And so, we remain waiting and hoping for complete freedom from this ultra-contagious virus with an eventual vaccine to relieve us from this lurking, ever-present, insidious and accursed thing!

In the beginning, it was the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters of chaos in the darkness, bringing forth order, light and life, fitting in very well with an evolutionary perspective from the start of it all. Genesis reflects on a simple picture of origins, as we now look out upon a complex and wonderful world of darkness and light, of which we are all part, inextricably linked with each other and the mystery of life. Jesus comes from and returns to the Father, but his presence and Spirit remain with us.

And Claude Mostowik MSC reminds us that Luke's account in Acts of the Apostles *"emphasizes that everyone is included and that all are loved by God, and the Holy Spirit is a living Spirit that moves the community from fear to fearlessness, from faltering to faith, from powerlessness to passionate power. Diversity becomes a blessing where people previously maintained and protected their differences behind walls of ethnocentrism. Nothing was lost by becoming one with all the others."*

Now it is for you and me to continue to reflect the Spirit of God, promised by Jesus, and continuing to inspire and guide us in our journeys of life and faith.

And, once more, may we continue to be careful and attentive, and stay safe, sane and as healthy and sensible as possible, producing the most difficult fruits of the Spirit, patience and ongoing self-control, with the peace of mind and peace with each other, offered by Jesus, to us, his friends!

john hannon

31st May 2020
