

HOMILY PENTECOST SUNDAY ESSENDON 2021
THE SPIRIT COMES FOR ALL WITH A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF TRUTH

Jn 15.26-27,16.12-16 AA 2.1-11 Gal 5.16-25

Well, here we are, 50 days gone now since Easter, and time relentlessly moves forward. Much can happen in a very short time, and things can change so quickly that it can seem surreal. The whole COVID experience reminds us of that, something we've never experienced before, with the lengthy lockdown and change to the way we do things, especially in regard to communication, expressions of affection and friendship. As we carefully move back towards a more normal reality, hopefully we are more aware of the importance of our relationships, the need for interpersonal engagement, and to be careful, with ourselves and those whom we encounter in our day to day lives, as we respond to the Spirit, and produce its good fruits. At the heart of it is the image of the dove, a sign of love and peace, a reminder I have on my Essendon stole, which I wear today over the red colours of Pentecost!

At our Confirmation celebrations on Friday, Bishop Terry Curtin provided a simple but thoughtful example of going into a store, using McDonalds (without promoting the wares!), and pointing out the difference between just pushing the video screen for one's order, paying by card, and meeting the person on the other side of the counter in a face to face engagement, and the need to think of that other person, not as just a functionary doing a job, but as one like you and me, a human being with a background story, a family and personal needs. We can't get too philosophical about it, but he suggests it is a moment for pause and reflection of each individual having an identity and needing acknowledgement, with a smile, a friendly greeting and gratitude expressed for service, each way. These little gestures can make all the difference in building a sense of connectedness, and so, a community of supportive friends. Simple enough, but reflective of the fruits of the Spirit in a small way.

One of the hazards of the technological age can be a sense of detachment from the human side of interaction. On the other hand, technology can be a wonderful thing, especially during lockdown, for engagement and interaction with loved ones with whom we couldn't be physically present.

The call to faith is here expressed by Jesus in a further extension of his farewell discourse, as he reminds his hearers of the difficulties ahead, but with the reassurance of the Spirit being present as guide and provider of inner strength and support for perseverance in facing the potential hostility of outside forces, rejecting the truth of his message of love and peace.

Pentecost is not just literally about wind and flame roaring through the gathered assembly, for a bit of novelty and excitement; these are symbols or images of the power of the Spirit being taken up and lived by believers. The wind brings energy and the flame light (reminding me of Einstein and $E = mc^2!$), as metaphors for the enthusiasm to be demonstrated by those who take to heart the gifts of the Spirit (remember the 7 we learned by rote for Confirmation? ***Wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord!*** and then apply them in producing the fruits, of which Paul speaks to Galatians today. He provides an interesting contrast between the dark side of human nature, with some graphic examples of nastiness and evil behaviour (I especially like his reference to wrangling, but we can leave out the orgies!!), where self-indulgence leads to hedonistic gratification, but with destructive consequences, whilst the bright and positive side of Christian love leads to happiness and personal fulfilment, seen in those fruits of ***peace, love, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control***. These are lovely words, but don't we know, their application can be challenging for all of us, as we face up to the temptations of life all around us, and our own personal demons and weaknesses, which can drag us down, easily enough at times?

As Brendan Byrne SJ says of today's feast: *"The overall sense would be that empowering Spirit, which rested solely on Jesus during his own life on earth, has now, in accordance with his promise, been distributed among those who are to carry on his mission – bringing the Word to Israel... then to Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth."*

And, again, my old mate Claude Mostowik MSC sums it up too: *"Jesus' footprints are still on the earth – they now become ours. The Spirit comes in different places, different circumstances and different people with fullness of life and healing... Pentecost challenges us to be a church that models the spirit of unity in*

diversity. We need to demonstrate, in practical terms, that our common faith, common baptism, common spirit, does bind us in a bond of love and friendship... As we reflect on people in our own communities and beyond that, suffer from illness, famine, abuse of state power, dismissal of certain groups within the Church, we must listen to their tongues and speak out.... Out of chaos and suffering, God birthed the Church. And so in this time of struggle, may the Church with its people, give birth to a 'new normal' that is founded on justice and peace."

Frank Moloney SDB, with his Essendon roots, also has a good line: *"Today's reminds us of the richness of the gift of the Spirit. It should fill us with courage and encourage us to respond to those unsolicited acts of faith, hope and life which rise up within us. They are the evidence of the Spirit within us, leading us forward into the wholeness of the truth, and into the wholeness of ourselves, as we realize our dreams."*

And so once more we look, not to the skies, but all around, at a wide and wonderful world, be it wild and wicked at times, as well, as we seek to reproduce the fruits of the Spirit, which cannot be contained, as it blows where it will (as the song says), the symbols of wind and fire spreading out, as we seek to continue to live the truth of the Gospel as good news for us and for all, in our fragile and precious world, in the spirit of Pentecost, as people of love and peace.

john hannon

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