



## **Pentecost Sunday 2020**

### **Homily**

**The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 31 May, 2020  
Cathedral Presbytery Chapel, Perth**

At the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, which many people speak of as the companion book to Saint Luke's Gospel, the author speaks about the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to his Father in heaven. This, of course, is the feast we celebrated last week.

According to Saint Luke, just before Jesus returned to his Father he said to his disciples: *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth* (Luke 1:8).

It is the fulfilment of this promise of Jesus which we celebrate today. We are told of this fulfilment in the First Reading, where we hear the dramatic account of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles gathered in prayer in the upper room. A powerful wind and burning flames of fire: these are the outward signs of an inner transformation that the Holy Spirit was bringing about, and they point to the kind of power Jesus had been talking about in his earlier promise to the apostles. The Holy Spirit did not bring then, and does not now, a power that is about domination or coercion or oppression. Rather the Holy Spirit brings a power that like a strong wind can turn a person's world upside down and like a burning flame can shed light in the darkest night. It is a power that enables those who receive it to be witnesses to one thing, or rather one person only: to Jesus. *"When the Holy Spirit has come upon you"* says Jesus, *"you shall be my witnesses"*.

Here is the mission of the Church summed up in one short phrase: *to be a witness to Christ*. Because it is the mission of the Church it is our mission, both as individuals and, more fundamentally, as members of the Church, for it is the Church, the community of the disciples of Christ, which is his witness in our world. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost does not come upon the apostles and those gathered with them as isolated individuals: the Holy Spirit comes upon them as brothers and sisters in the community of faith. This original community had a leader, Peter, who often spoke on behalf of the community and who provided the leadership of the community as the Petrus, the rock, on which Jesus promised to build his Church, but it was the community, united together in a communion of life and love, which received the commission from Christ, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, to witness to Christ.

We are part of that community, that Church, which was energised at the first Pentecost. We have been given the same mission and we have received the same Spirit through our Baptism and our Confirmation. The paradox is, of course, that we who are called and commissioned to be the privileged witnesses to Christ's presence and grace in our world are ourselves so often stumbling and confused as we struggle with the darkness of our own lives. As individual Christian disciples and as the Catholic community of faith we cannot be blind to the many ways in which we have in the past and continue now to be so much less than the Lord needs us and is calling us to be. How can we respond to the needs of others when we are so needy ourselves? How can we heal others when we are ourselves wounded?



We are not the first to feel this way. The apostles who gathered together in Jerusalem with Mary the mother of Jesus and with a wider group of his disciples on the first Pentecost Sunday (cf. Acts 1:14) had in a sense “lost” Jesus. After the bitter trauma of their Lord’s crucifixion and death, and then the undreamt of renewal of all their hopes in their encounter with the risen Lord, they saw him taken from their sight once more as he ascended to his Father in heaven. They must have wondered if they would ever see him again. They must have wondered how they would continue on without his sustaining presence. Certainly their minds and hearts must have been filled with all that the risen Lord had shared with them, and certainly, too, their hopes must have been raised by his promise to send them “*another Advocate, the Holy Spirit*” (cf. John 14:26). But what could talk of this Holy Spirit mean to those who had not yet received this gift? The first community of Jesus’ disciples, as they gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem, must have been as confused and as hopeful as Christians have always been as they pondered, as perhaps many of us still do, the paradox of the Lord’s seeming absence and, at the same time his mysterious presence, in our lives and wonder how we are to respond.

Perhaps it was the very combination of confusion, of doubt and of expectant hope which made that small gathering of believers open to the gift which God was about to pour out on them. After all, those who believe they have all the answers already will not be able to recognise their need for the gift of the Spirit. As the gospels continually remind us, it is those who, like Simon Peter, recognise their need for forgiveness and renewal who are able to welcome the gift when it is offered. Those instead who are locked in their own self-righteousness, like some of the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ time, have hard hearts which close them off to the healing power of God’s love.

God has brought his Church into existence so that it can be a living and life-giving sign of the presence of Christ among us still today as our shepherd, our healer, and our saviour. Our faith is always a gift and a mission. The love of God which we receive and recognise in and through our life in the Church is a love we are called to share with others. The Plenary Council journey, which the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to re-imagine but certainly not abandon, can continue to offer us hope that we can, together, become all that the Lord needs us to be. May the precious Gift of the Holy Spirit, whose coming at Pentecost we remember today, be poured out on the Church in great abundance. May we all be open to receive this gift with gratitude and embrace it with joy and hope.