
Bishop Paul Bird's Homily for Pentecost Sunday (Year C – 2013)

The Year of Grace, Ballarat Cathedral

Just twelve months ago, the Australian bishops invited us to celebrate a Year of Grace. The idea was to take time over these twelve months to reflect on the grace of God, the gifts that God bestows. This Year of Grace began on Pentecost 2012 and concludes today, on the feast of Pentecost 2013.

It is particularly appropriate that a Year of Grace be linked to Pentecost, because Pentecost is a great feast of grace, a feast of the gifts of God, a feast of the gift of the Holy Spirit and all the gifts that the Holy Spirit brings.

Each year on this feast we have the dramatic story of the first Christian Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came on the apostles with the sound of a powerful wind from heaven and in the form of tongues of fire and the apostles were given the amazing power to speak in many languages about the marvels of God.

In our own lives, the gifts of the Spirit might sometimes come in dramatic ways. We might sometimes have a powerful sense of God being with us. We might sometimes feel that God is showing us clearly what we should do or that God is giving us special strength to meet some crisis. On the other hand, the grace of God might come in less dramatic ways. The gifts of God might come quietly as when someone offers us a comforting word in a time of sadness or we feel a sense of peace of heart even though we're facing some problems in our life.

The Spirit of God does bring many gifts – comfort in sorrow, healing of hurts, forgiveness of sins. This is beautifully expressed in one of the hymns used on this feast of Pentecost. It is a hymn that prays that the Holy Spirit will come to us in our needs.

Thou, of all consolers best, thou the soul's delightful guest, dost refreshing peace bestow.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew, on our dryness pour thy dew, wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will, melt the frozen, warm the chill; guide the steps that go astray.

The final verse of the hymn reminds us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not only gifts for this present life but they are also gifts for the life of the world to come. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bring us comfort at the hour of our death and lead us through death to eternal life.

Give us comfort when we die; give us life with thee on high; give us joys that never end.

Over this past year, some people have made much of this Year of Grace. They have devoted a good deal of time to reflecting on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They have been involved in special gatherings for prayer, giving thanks for the gifts of God. But whether we have been much involved in Year of Grace events or not, we all have the chance in our Mass today to celebrate the conclusion of this Year of Grace with a special prayer of thanksgiving. And we can also pray for continued grace from God.

Today marks the end of this particular Year of Grace but it certainly does not mark the end of the grace of God. May each day of our lives be a grace-filled day. May every year be a Year of Grace.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR