

These notes are not intended for use as a homily. They are prepared as a set of different ideas that may help to trigger thoughts of your own. They do try to connect Pentecost Sunday's Readings to "Laudato Si' Week, occurring in Australia at the moment, as well as to the 150th Jubilee of the diocese. JMCK.

Today's First Reading presents readers with St Luke's well known story of happenings embedding the out-pouring of the Spirit on the first disciples on the original Pentecost morning.

1. Luke used the image of a "powerful wind from heaven" to connect the Pentecost event with the Genesis story of the world's creation. There we read that "God's spirit hovered over the water" from which the world was first created.

Luke was signalling that with Pentecost something utterly new was happening to and in our world: the task entrusted by God to the First Parents "to cultivate and tend the earth" was now being "re-entrusted" to the "communit[ies] of disciples" and, through them, to all the peoples of then world.

2. At the same time, in the room where the apostles were, "something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire" that "separated and came to rest on the head of each of them". Luke remarked that "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" and found themselves speaking "foreign languages". People, who had "gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven" to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, could hear the apostles preaching in their "own language about the marvels of God."

In an early chapter of the Hebrew Bible, the story of the Tower of Babel had served to illustrate how the rise of separate languages had led to chronic disunity and hostility — that had continued since then to disfigure personal, social and even international relationships. Luke was now indicating that, once again through the action of the Spirit, a common vision was finally to replace the disunity that had become the normal experience of the entire world.

The Spirit of Love, flowing back and forth between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity, was wonderfully at work in the world!

In today's Second Reading, St Paul spoke of that Spirit as the source of harmony uniting members of the Church and motivating their precious discipleship and mutual service, drawing into unity, as Paul put it, "Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens...". Jesus' vision of universal love was about to penetrate the world.

The same Spirit is at work also in our world and in our Church today — but the Spirit's success still awaits the whole-hearted co-operation of all disciples and people of good-will.

Today's Gospel Reading is taken from the Gospel of John. The changing circumstances confronting the expanding Church communities continued to raise new questions and needed new answers. John's Gospel presumed some awareness on the part of his readers of the existence of Paul's Letters and the three Gospels written by Mark, Matthew and Luke. John wrote his Gospel to stimulate his readers' deeper spiritual appreciation of what they already knew, to deepen and to personalise their faith and personal relationship with Jesus, in the hope that thereby they would become ever more fully alive.

John's treatment of the coming of the Spirit to the "Church" was quite different from Luke's. John did not borrow the somewhat spectacular version of Luke's description of the Feast of Pentecost. Instead, he timed the gift of the Spirit on the night of Jesus' Resurrection.

The Spirit-filled Risen Jesus appeared to the fearful, guilty disciples. Within that context, Jesus' greeting of "Peace" was an offer of forgiveness, given gratuitously with no mention of prior conditions. Its effect was that those disciples became truly alive, and "were filled with joy".

Jesus went so far as to entrust to the community of disciples the continuation of the very same mission entrusted to him by God his Father. To eliminate any chance of their not understanding that mission, he delicately and intimately "breathed" on the disciples, and said simply, "Receive the Holy Spirit".

In describing the gift of the creatively loving Spirit in this way, the Evangelist recalled the original creation of humanity's first parents, where in the second of the creation accounts [Genesis 2.7], the author recounted how "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life".

The Spirit-filled disciples were not only to love the world as Jesus had done, but were to express that love as Jesus had expressed it: "For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven." Jesus clearly understood forgiveness as the ultimate and precious experience of human liberation.

Unfortunately, many translations continue "...those whose sins you retain, they are retained". In fact, Jesus was commissioning the disciples, in addition to forgiving, to "keeping firm hold of" forgiven sinners that they too might share in Jesus' resurrection to eternal life [as in John 6.39-40].

What might all this mean for us today?

* With Pope Francis, can we take to heart the message of his Encyclical "Laudato Si'"? In a world where pollution is rife, where we are exploiting our natural resources, choking our oceans with waste, destroying the very atmosphere we breathe, let the Spirit sensitise us to the "marvels of God" that surround us:

- Let us look for them in our own lives.
- Let us take time to appreciate them.
- Let us be open to be amazed and astonished by the beauty of our world,
- Let us determinedly act practically to preserve our delicate world.

* Let us purposefully look for what Paul suggested: "the particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person for a good purpose". Let us mature beyond personal selfishness, and become alert to how much we are destroying the habitats of other peoples and other species.

* At a time when our TV screens carry such harrowing pictures of war with its cold, heartless destructiveness of lives, of infrastructure and of homes, as well as fertile land, let us keep practising the clear message of Jesus to forgive ourselves, and to forgive others. Can we determinedly replace the world's hatreds with respect and forgiveness — and allow the "Joy of the Spirit" to enter our lives as well as the lives of others?

And does Pentecost have a message for the diocese as it celebrates its sesquicentenary this year?

The Pentecost Readings have revealed the Spirit of God as a "God of Surprises". We do not need to know what the future holds. Who would have anticipated Pentecost? We can confidently leave the future in the hands of God's Spirit.