



Pentecost Homily

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St Cecilia Church, Floreat Wembley Parish
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Some years ago I went home to visit my brother and his wife, and their daughter who at that time was just twelve years old. While I was there I remembered that I had once given my niece a book as a Christmas present. It was a copy of a book I had myself read quite a few years previously when I was at Teachers' College, one I had enjoyed very much. It occurred to me that I might like to read it again, so I asked my niece if I could borrow it. She had no problem about lending it to me, but it took her a while to find it, because she had never read it herself and had just stuck it into one of her draws or bookshelves. When I asked her why she hadn't read it, she said that she just hadn't gotten around to it, and that kind of story didn't appeal to her anyway. Obviously the kinds of books which appeal to someone who is studying to be a teacher may not necessarily be all that appealing to the children he might one day find himself teaching. It was a good lesson to learn.

In thinking about that little incident, it occurred to me that this kind of thing can happen often. I wonder how many of us might have clothes, or books, or DVD's or other things which have been given to us as presents but which, for one reason or another, we have never used. It is one thing to be given a gift, isn't it, and another thing all together to use that gift and to use it well.

Today's feast of Pentecost is a celebration of gifts: indeed, it is a feast about the best gift of all – God himself. We remember, and in a sense find ourselves drawn into the coming of the Holy Spirit to the newly formed Church, gathered together around Mary, the Mother of the Lord, the apostles of Jesus, and many of his other faithful followers. This extraordinary event was the deeper fulfilment for the whole Church of a promise which for the group of the twelve apostles on the night of the resurrection of Jesus was already fulfilled when Jesus breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit". Today, with the whole Church right around the world, we pray the ancient prayer of the Church, asking that this gift will be renewed in our own time and in our own lives - *"Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts, and set us on fire with your love."*

In one of Saint Paul's letters he gives us some advice as to how we can recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and among us. He explains to us what the Holy Spirit's coming into our lives will mean: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are certainly gifts worth having, and it would be helpful for us to reflect on just how much our lives would be changed if we could only receive these gifts more fully into our lives. How many of us really long to be more patient, more gentle with those we love, more in control of our lives. How many of us wish that there was a little more joy in our lives; that the goodness we know is in us might come to the surface more often, that our love could be more generous and sincere. The kinds of things which the Holy Spirit brings are the very things which could make our lives richer and more loving and more deeply human.



And so, yes, it does make sense for us to pray, “*Come Holy Spirit.*” It is what the Church is inviting us to do in a special way today. But it is a prayer which, in a very real sense, has already been granted. All of us who are baptized are already bearers of the Spirit of God. When the water was poured over our heads, so too was the Spirit of God poured out on us. When at our Confirmation the bishop made the sign of the cross on our foreheads with the Sacred Oil of Chrism, we were filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s gifts and were strengthened and renewed and commissioned to be signs and bearers of God’s love. And all of us who have ever received communion, and all of us who will receive communion today, have the presence of Jesus entering into the deepest reality of our lives, transforming us slowly but surely into living images of his own loving presence to the world.

All of this has already happened and continues to be a part of us. All of it is renewed and deepened each time we receive Holy Communion at Mass. All of these gifts of peace and courage and understanding and love – the gifts which are the fruit of God’s Spirit who lives in us – these are already ours.

But we, like my niece, have a choice. The book I gave her as a gift was hers – she chose not to read it, not to use it. The gifts of God’s Spirit are ours, they are already in our possession, they belong to us – but we still have the choice of ignoring them, or pushing them aside out of the way, or failing to make the most of them. It may be that we have done that for many years, but like the gift that lies unused on the library shelf or hidden away in the drawer, the presence and power of God’s Spirit, God himself, lies deep within us just waiting for us to remember him, to turn to him, and to allow him to be for us all that he wants to be.

And so today, and every day, let us pray with great hope and sincerity, “*Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts, and set us on fire with your love.*”