

## Pentecost 2023

We have a lot of readings today – to mark out this day to be a red hot, special Feast! It is a day ignored by commerce except to sell holidays; they used to be called Whitsun holidays, a welcome break from school routine, unless you were preparing for exams. But in the life of the Church, **today** marks the anniversary and ‘birthday’ of the Church, because what started out as a small and very localised group of the earliest Christian disciples, often meeting in secret, became an altogether bigger, and international affair.

At a large school assembly here in Church last week, I used the setting of our first reading from Acts to try and explain this. But I was worried about pronouncing all those complicated native languages and places, so I was ‘saved’ by a new and friendlier translation or, retelling, of this wonderful story. The story is entitled ‘The Helper Arrives’ to describe not only to children, of course, that the Holy Spirit really does help us, encourage us and inspire us.

Here’s an excerpt from the ‘Lion Storyteller Bible’:

“Jesus’ friends were in an upstairs room when suddenly....

‘We are not filled with wine. We’re filled with something else – God’s own Holy Spirit!’”

So in everyday language we can understand, we can know and discover the rumour of, and assurance of: God’s love across the globe, wherever we travel, wherever we land, wherever Christian community abides. And in the beautiful

words of our choir anthem today, this communal vision is turned into a private prayer for each of us: “give me faith for what I cannot see, breathe new life in me.”

Naturally, later writers like St Paul want to put this into some kind of theological context and meaning. Having this new life in the Spirit isn't a quick fix like drugs and alcohol and rock 'n roll! It is a process of discernment and self-knowledge, appreciating the different gifts we are given: be that wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy...and thanking God for them, passing them on, leaving your mark and legacy on the future happiness of the church, catholic.

If I may speak more personally, I know what I am not. I am not a great Evangelist, who thumps on the pulpit telling people loudly what they should believe or, who sways side to side at the latest chorus, arms waving, eyes closed – you know the ‘Songs of Praise’ scene of today, with flashing coloured lights – all singing and dancing to say how ‘cool we are, or how contemporary we are’. BUT...

I still believe in Evangelism and sharing our great stories of faith and reaching out and across all the different social, ecclesial, and political divides; I still believe the Holy Spirit empowers and equips us to overcome every difficulty and challenge and, yes, sorrow and failure, too. All the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, discerned and built upon together, still make for a transformational faith and an attractive, fulfilling vocation to be the ‘rainbow people of God’ – who really can make a difference to our world, to our town, to our

colleagues and families. Our prayers and Christian action combined can really stop people in their tracks especially when, so often, God speaks to us in that still small voice of calm and God's presence and energy is kindled and felt so powerfully once again. Together, we form a vital chemistry to light up one another's lives and to be Christ's dependable, faithful body, alive in Him, and enlivened by His Holy Spirit, Our Helper.

Amen.