

PENTECOST FEAST' 26

I've got lots of witnesses. And not least, Linda and Nick on a very busy bar on Friday night! If you had wandered into St Mary's about 9pm you would have seen everyone standing and swaying on their feet, clapping to the sound of soul. One person remarked on Facebook, 'St Mary's was rocking'! And it is no exaggeration to say that, at the end, everyone left chatting away and smiling.

I have no idea if the first Pentecost was like that. Our first reading from Acts seems to suggest that mix of bewilderment and surprise, each speaking in their own tongue, creating a babble of different sounds and dissonance. St Peter bravely steps in to explain this is none other than Joel's prophecy ringing true; that God has indeed poured His Spirit on all flesh. How can we forget those inspiring words: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams?"

Our second reading from St Paul to the people of Corinth is less concerned about what happened or how people reacted. This is more like a considered meditation on what the coming of the Holy Spirit really means, how each of us can identify, use, and grow, the different God-given gifts in us: to help us to flourish, to help us build up the body of Christ, to encourage us to look forward and not backwards. And there is a true catholicity in Paul's thinking. It doesn't matter whether you prefer jazz to classical, whether you speak different languages or inhabit different cultures. It is our

baptism which marks us all out and which unites us. Despite all our differences or difficulties (anyone who attends or helps with our Churches Together 'agendas' will know what I mean), nevertheless "we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Sometimes we forget our common vocation as Christians to sing the same song we declare every week in the Nicene Creed:

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life." This profound truth, bound up with God's Trinitarian outpouring of love, is the flame which should unite us, and free us, and embolden us. Our shared Christian vocation and mission is not supposed to be dreary or drab but instead, life-enhancing, transforming us to do what seems impossible to do: "to renew the face of the earth." We are all witnesses to what God has done and is still doing through us and for us, to bring new life and hope to the world.

Our Gospel defines this Pentecost task as bound up with Easter, and Christ passing on the baton to become his disciples in the world and keep the flames of resurrection faith burning. To do that we have to be agents of forgiveness and reconciliation. George Herbert's poem called 'Whitsunday' is really a prayer which begins:

"Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee."

For me, today's feast is all about trusting in this God of ours who wants to have a special relationship with each of us. God wants to give us the courage to fly in tandem with Him, a murmuration if you will, of our depending and belonging to the Lord of every sky in creation. By the power of His Holy Spirit we can rejoice and be glad!

You may not go out today dancing and swaying but all of us are gifted with the blessings and tasks God has given us to do - to become, remain and grow as His 'Easter People' until we can feast in the banquet of heaven.

AMEN.

