Feast of Pentecost

On the first Pentecost, Mary and the disciples were gathered in prayer. Jesus had been crucified; he was no longer with them in the way he was before. They clung to his promise that he would remain with them in another way, and to the end of the world. He had said: 'You will see me; because I live, you also will live'(John 14:19). 'I will reveal myself to those who love me'(John 14:21). 'I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will taker your joy from you'(John 16:22). They would experience his Spirit, healing, forgiving and comforting them to live in loving communion with each other; and encouraging and empowering them to reach out to others in love. The narrative from the Acts of the Apostles, chosen as our First Reading today, gives a dramatic account of how Jesus kept his promise. Each one present was given a special gift of the fire of Jesus' love.

Our faith tells us that we have to look beyond the surface ugliness in our world, and recognise that the only real power in this world is the power of God's Spirit and that this power is the power of love. The world is like a huge room on which the sun of God's love is always shining. When we sin we pull down the blind and draw the curtains, plunging our lives into darkness. But we do not stop the sun shining. In the dark, we stumble, and we hurt ourselves and one another; we are lost and insecure, and we do ugly things. But today's feast reminds us that the Spirit of God's love is there. Jesus' heart must hurt when he sees all the terrible things people do to each other. But his heart must fill with joy when he sees the numberless wonderful people in the world who welcome his Spirit and live simple, loving, self-giving lives. Our task is to let the tongues of fire inflame our hearts and stir us to cast upon the earth that flame of love which burns in the Heart of Jesus. In the words of Teilhard de Chardin, we are to 'harness for God the energies of love'. If we do, we will 'discover fire'.

If we want to see what God can do in someone who is completely open to his love, we look at Jesus. He saw things so differently. Others saw a leper; Jesus saw a man loved by God and longing to be recognised by others as belonging to them. Jesus embraced him and opened the way for him to rejoin the community. Others saw a prostitute; Jesus saw a woman who had so much loving to give and to receive. Others saw a criminal dying on a cross; Jesus saw a man who longed for peace and communion with God. Jesus wept as we weep, but he refused to despair. He struggled in agony, as we struggle in agony, but he refused to stop pleading with God.
It is Jesus' own Spirit that is poured into our hearts today, and every day. In union with all Jesus' disciples throughout the world today let us hold this prayer in our hearts: 'Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth'. If we pray this prayer earnestly, but find that the world looks just as bleak tomorrow, let us not give up. When we love someone we cannot force them to love us back. Neither can God. God is all-powerful, but He is all-powerful love. He can do everything that love can do, but, precisely because God is love, he will not force people to receive his love or to respond to it.

There is only one heart and life over which each of us does have some control, and that is our own. So, if today we earnestly pray: 'Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth', what we are really praying is that we ourselves will be open to God's love and God's inspiration. It may not remove the cross from us, but we will be astonished at the difference that it will make to the world. If enough people do it, the face of the earth will indeed be renewed.

May our gathering together in silent prayer be a reminder for us of the desire of the Heart of Jesus for us all to be one, and of the love of God for all peoples. May it also be a witness to others of the fact that we give glory to God for the wonderful diversity of cultures in our land. We witness as well to our belief that God's love can bind us into a community characterised by mutual respect and a peaceful sharing of God's gifts which are meant for us all.

Pentecost is a timely reminder of the truth expressed at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer: 'Heaven and earth are full of your glory'. A modern equivalent is found in the poem of the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins which he entitled *God's grandeur:*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

Sequence for Pentecost (attributed to Stephen Langdon, died 1228)

Holy Spirit, Lord of light, from the clear celestial height,
your pure beaming radiance give.

Come, Father of the poor, come with treasures which endure,
come, light of all that live!

You, of all consolers best, you, the soul's delightful guest,
such refreshing peace bestow.

You in toil are comfort sweet; pleasant coolness in the heat;
solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine, visit now these hearts of thine
and our inmost being fill.

If you take your grace away, nothing pure in us will stay,
all our good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew; on our dryness pour your dew;

wash the stains of sin away:

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

We pray you, we who evermore you confess and you adore,
with your sevenfold gifts descend:

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