

## **Pentecost SFX 2023**

### *A New Pentecost*

“He breathed on them and said: “receive the Holy Spirit.”

On the eve of the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII implored. “O Holy Spirit renew your wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost.” He called for a renewal of the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *Semper reformada* – as the Latin phrase puts it. Always reforming. The church is forever young under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, always evangelical, always missionary, always filled with zeal, hope and love.

When we talk of reform and renewal we are not just talking about change for changes sake, but a renewal that is true to the Spirit of Jesus. So it is worth going back to the beginning of St Luke’s Gospel, when Jesus picked up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and said: “The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.”

This is what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the measure of our faithfulness to Jesus, when what we present as Christians is Good News and we are not as Pope John said “prophets of doom”, when our presence is enhancing and liberating not stifling and condemning, when we are bringers of hope and healing not creators of antipathy and division. Over the centuries the Church has often failed in its task. We have failed because we are the Church. I do not always live with the Spirit of Jesus in me, but at our best we, like the little group of apostles, are the leaven that makes the world rise in love joy and peace.

On this Sunday when we commemorate the Birthday of the Church I would like to quote from the lovely Philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel – he was a Jewish observer at the Second Vatican Council but he had a warning for all religions as they sought to relate to the modern world. “It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendour of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion--its message becomes meaningless.”

In the creed we call the Holy Spirit the “Lord, the Giver of Life” and today we ask the Holy Spirit to breathe that life into us. At a personal level: “Bend and soften what is rigid, warm what has become frozen, to reform and renew us. Breathe that life into us. “The glory of God is the human person fully alive” said Saint Irenaeus.

We can reflect on that amazing and astonishing scene in Jerusalem, when the

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; Mesopotamia, Judaeans and Cappadocians, and all the rest, Jews and Gentiles heard the Gospel in their own language. And how we can rejoice that this little Church of St Francis Xavier is a microcosm of the whole church, peoples gathered from so many nations to praise the Lord. “The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole earth.”

What Babel had separated Pentecost brings together. A church filled with a variety of gifts, engaged in a variety of service, the same good Lord working in everyone. How can we grow together in love of the Lord. Holy Spirit inspire us, work within us.

The first Pentecost was ‘the Birthday of the Church,’ a turning point in the history of Christianity, as the disciples no longer saw themselves as a small group of Jewish believers, but rather as a universal Church that was open to people of all races and backgrounds, transcending national and cultural boundaries continues to be a defining feature of Christianity to this day.

Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension and now Pentecost. We might think that we are coming to the end of something as tomorrow we go back into ordinary time. But quite the reverse. Pentecost is not an appendix to the cross and resurrection. For the Apostles it was the beginning of a new mission. And for us we pray to pick up that Spirit, to be quickened by that experience of God in our lives that comes out of the depths of our being.

The Spirit, the Lord the Giver of Life who came early to Mary at the Annunciation to bring Jesus to the world. The Spirit in whom we are anointed to continue that mission of Jesus to bring the good news, to proclaim liberty, so lift up and to set free. It is fitting that we have our May Procession, and honour Mary through whom the Spirit brought Jesus to birth in the world. We ask that today Jesus be brought to birth through the Spirit in us.

Let us pray that, as the Body of Christ, we may become **more Spirit-filled** – more loving, more compassionate, more generous, more willing to surrender ourselves to the path of the gospel, that we, like Jesus, may become the Spirit-filled and living word of God in our world today.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful. Enkindle in us the fire of your love.