

Solemnity of Pentecost

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

The Sacrament of Confirmation is generally conferred on Pentecost Sunday or as close as possible to that day when the Church commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early Christian community in Jerusalem. Part of the preparation of candidates for Confirmation, generally conferred on young people on the threshold of adult life, is helping them to understand that when the Spirit comes on them they receive a series of gifts. The catechism examination they have prior to reception of Confirmation often focuses on those gifts: *wisdom, counsel, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, piety & fear of the Lord*. They are expected to know them by heart! These gifts are conferred on the Church as a whole as the Spirit descends upon her at Pentecost, yet the description of the first Pentecost provided by the Acts of the Apostles makes clear that the tongue of fire came on the individual head of each person gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem. Each individual is individually gifted on Pentecost Sunday, and those same seven gifts harness different qualities and bring out different talents in those who receive them.

It is important to remember that the gifts of the Spirit empower and enhance the latent talents of the huge variety of people which make up any school class, any family or – a very important thing to remember in 2020 – any parish community. The gifts of the Spirit are always bestowed on the individual Christian with a view to his/her being able to make her/his unique contribution to the building up of the community. The gifts are not for us to hog, to keep hidden away or to invest for the rainy day! No, they are for us to use here and now, they propel us into adult life so that we can do our bit in making our parish community a better, richer and holier family. Paul spotted a lot of talent in the early Christian community of Corinth: there were teachers, administrators, prophets, readers etc. And he listed the qualities and the virtues they needed to carry out their respective functions: patience, humility, fortitude, piety etc. And those roles in the early community in Corinth and those personal qualities highlighted by Paul are all present in every Christian community across the world today.

Whether we be in a cathedral, a suburban parish or a mission station, our community needs to be (re)built continually, regardless how old it is. And now, as we tentatively return from lockdown or make remote preparations for “normality”, we know that our church communities will have to be built again from the bottom up. Never has the Pentecost experience been more necessary for the Church than this year! Let us pray that those gifts may be conferred on each and every one of us, that the gifts we already possess may be unleashed and put at the disposal of the church community and, with the grace of the Spirit, let us set about rebuilding our Church and *renew the face of the earth*.

Father Patrick