

PENTECOST SUNDAY

How exciting is Pentecost Sunday? It ought to be exciting because birthdays are always exciting events and Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. All members of the Catholic Church celebrate this day by wearing red and rejoicing in God's great gifts. The Church is the bride of Christ that was conceived from his wounded side on Calvary, modelled on the Virgin Mary and given life by being born of the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day after the Resurrection.

For the Jews back then, it was a principal feast in their annual calendar. For us, here at our Armidale Cathedral it is a grand feast because our confirmands will receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. God will download abundant grace complete with the sevenfold gifts into their souls leaving an indelible mark that will better configure them to Christ.

How did we arrive at this Confirmation event, this day? Every cause has its effect. Parents you are the cause of this grand event. We thus thank you for honouring your promises made at your children's baptism so long ago. As we encourage the sponsors to assist these children today and into the future, we remind the confirmands that today you will promise God yourselves to keep the faith. How will you fulfil those promises?

Before you answer, let us return back to the Upper Room sometimes called the Cenacle in Jerusalem to that first pentecostal encounter with God. Christ had promised to send his spirit that would transform his apostles from within. If he had of stayed here with us his presence would have remained external to them but now via the Holy Spirit they were internally imbued with his living and dynamic presence. A presence made known by those mystical tongues of fire that proceeds from his grace. What is grace? It is a divine power. The word is *dynamis* is Greek, not dissimilar to dynamite. A tremendous invisible power was manifested via sight and sound - our two most powerful external senses. We are told that the Apostles heard the roar of the wind around them. I tend to liken that to the engines of a Boeing jet as it takes off from the tarmac. It is deafening and powerful. Then they saw these mysterious flames, the shape of tongues, burning over their heads. Flames that expel light and heat but do not burn. Some gas fireplaces today seem to manifest flames of this type. Yet these are Godly flames of divine origin that signify the charismatic blessings and sevenfold gifts that are poured into the souls of those present. One of the charismatic blessings given then was the ability to be heard in different languages. We can call this simultaneous translations. The apostle spoke in his own language but is heard in every other language. The word for language and tongue is much the same which gives rise to the phrase 'speaking in tongues'.

There are two great missionaries who seemed to receive this gift for the sake of those in pastoral need. One was St Francis Xavier, Jesuit evangelizer and patron of the missions. He died at 46 years old (1552) after being a missionary in India, Japan and China. In twelve years he baptized at least 30,000 people. But he had to teach and convert them first which required linguistic talents. One hundred years later, another Spanish Jesuit, was given this gift of tongues, called St Peter Claver known as the patron saint of the slaves. His ministry was in Colombia where he met the slave ships from Africa arriving in America. He would assist them upon their arrival, especially the sick, learn their languages and baptize them, if they so chose, before they were sent to their work stations. It is estimated that in his forty years of pastoral ministry he baptized 300,000 people. What a legacy he left those poor souls.

What legacy will you leave one day? A legacy left is like the baton passed on in a relay race which always involves a giver and a receiver. The flame of faith has been given to you – keep it burning then pass it on. You confirmands will keep your faith if you do three things. Something daily, something weekly, something monthly for God. Daily prayer to God who is real – prayer is an actual conversation with him. Remember that he has a plan for you. Something weekly is our Sunday Mass commitment that sadly most Aussie Catholics wilfully fail to fulfil thus incur a mortal sin and loss of grace. It is a Godly moral obligation and not an optional extra for the religious. We need to remain connected to God so that we worship Someone and not something. Lastly, monthly confession to heal our souls with divine forgiveness. All relationships need healing at times. So, let us entrust our lives to God's divine Spirit and pray that he renews us by his powerful seven-fold Gifts on this Pentecost Sunday.