

Sunday Thought

23rd May 2021 Pentecost Sunday

Readings

Acts 2: 1-21

Psalm 104: 24 – 34, 35b

Romans 8: 22 - 27

John 15: 26 – 27, 16: 4b-15

What's Up?

On that memorable Pentecost people all over Jerusalem city were asking *What's Up? What's this all about?* We know the answers they received from the Acts reading today; *There's been a hurricane! It rushed through the city and through the house where the Jesus people were gathered for prayer together! There were flames of fire, fanned by the wind and dancing around on the heads of the Jesus people. They and the whole house were turned upside down. People rushed to the place, wanting to see and know what was happening but all they could hear was a babble of voices, some even speaking recognisable languages. It was all confusion, wonder, fear*



What's Up? When Luke wrote the story there had been years of reminiscing about it all, and for him

the key fact was *'Peter stood up with the eleven - and PREACHED!'*

For the past nine days since Jesus had ascended to heaven the first Christians had met for prayer and for what may have been the church's first committee meeting! They would, no doubt, many times have gone over the last words of Jesus to them on the mountain where they saw him returning to the Father – *'Now you will be my witnesses in all Judaea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.'* *'In my name you will give the world the message I gave you about repentance and forgiveness.'* The ascension was not a fireworks moment like Pentecost It was an experience of awesome clouds. Clouds had always been a sign of the presence of God and the nearness of heaven. Quietly, watched by his men, Jesus walked away through the cloud into that other dimension of life we call heaven. He had completed the work his Father had given him to do. His next step was for the disciples – with him.

In those first church meetings I am sure there was one recurring question – *But How? How do we tell a big, often hostile, world? How do we call people to repent and believe?* They would recall Jesus' words which are in today's Gospel reading – *I will give you another Helper – the Spirit.* He had promised to be with them in a new way. His Spirit, the Spirit of God would be with them and in them. And so, Pentecost was the answer to their 'how'! The Holy Spirit! The Spirit, best understood as Jesus' everywhere self, is God's answer to every believer's 'how'. He is the power of God in and through his people. Miracles and wonders will follow.

Pentecost has been called the Birthday of the Church, but it means far more than that. It was the beginning of the Good News of Jesus reaching out to the whole world. It seems to me that one of the most significant memories of that day was the amazing babble of voices in the Upper Room and out into the street and even into the Temple. It was festival time again and Jerusalem was filled with international Jewish pilgrims. Those visitors as well as the locals were able to say, *'we are hearing the same message in our own languages!'* That day the Good News was declared as being Universal – for everyone – just as Jesus made clear from the beginning - *God loved **the world** so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* Peter claimed his Master's vision as he preached that day – *'this is what God, through the prophet Joel, said would happen - The Spirit will be poured out on everyone, the message will be proclaimed and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

Yes, it was the beginning of the Church. Many times since then, there have been new beginnings with new outpourings of the 'enabler'. We pray at this time for a new post-pandemic start. That involves us prayerfully opening our lives to the Spirit of Jesus and sharing the passion of Paul in our reading from the letter to the Romans where he, heart-achingly, yearns for the whole world to know the freedom of the children of God. When the Church shares that passion and prayer we too shall need to be ready to give an answer to those who will ask us *'What's Up?'*

A Prayer (with thoughts from Psalm 104)

*Praise God, the wise creator of all things,
He has filled our world, the earth, the skies, the oceans,
With so many creatures
Each with their own attractive beauty,
Each with their place in the natural order,
Each dependent on Him,
Each breathing with the life he has given them.*

*Lord, you have pleasure and glory in your creation:
May we not do anything to spoil its life and beauty.*

