

More than just remembering

Well, it's Pentecost again and we celebrate the birthday of the Church. On this day the people of God were launched into action. We heard in the scriptures how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles, Peter addressed the crowd and thousands were added to the number of the believers. The Church had begun and it was growing rapidly, miraculously and people came to know the grace of God at work in their lives and committed themselves to the gospel.

Of course the name Pentecost comes from the fact that it is 50 days after Easter (well, roughly 50 days). Jewish people celebrate Shavu'ot 50 days after the first day of Passover, traditionally it is the festival of first fruits of the harvest, a bit out of sync in the southern hemisphere. It is was this festival that brought the crowds to Jerusalem

But today, we don't celebrate Shavu'ot, we celebrate the events that occurred on that day when the Spirit was poured out on Gods people. We hear the scriptures reminding us of the events on that day, some of us wear red, and the vestments used in church are red, to remind us of the tongues of fire that alighted on the heads of the apostles

gathered in the upper room. Some churches will bring out a birthday cake to celebrate.

According to Diana Eck in her book "Encountering God", the church in the middle ages had creative ways of celebrating Pentecost. "Some churches had 'Holy Spirit holes' in the ceiling to symbolize their openness to God, doves were released through the holes and bundles of rose petals were dropped from them onto the people gathered inside.

Choirboys moved through the congregation making whooshing sounds and playing drums to remind everyone of the rush of the spirit. What a sight to behold". A bit more dramatic than wearing red socks and vestments.

But is that as far as it goes?

Is Pentecost any more for us than the day we wear red to church and look forward to cake afterwards. Not that there's anything wrong with cake afterwards.

But is that all. Is this merely a day to remember something from the past, that once upon a time something very special happened but is all in the past.

There is no aspect of Pentecost that gives me the impression that it was just for remembering. It seems to me clear from the account of Pentecost that we find in Acts that this is about beginnings. Not just THE beginning of the church but new beginnings.

I'm in a bit of a bind here. In my mind I can see some sort of image of what this might mean for the personnel I meet from day to day on the base. And I can sort of see what this might mean for the people of Boonah*Harrisville Parish. These are the communities in which I am closely involved. But to say what that might mean for the people of Ipswich..... I'm currently a bit detached from life in Ipswich these days.

You are the ones who need to see what that means for the people of Ipswich. And I guess in many ways that's exactly what's going through your minds at this stage. Preparing to take part of your journey into the future with Fr. Owen Strong as locum and then beyond. There's lots of mystery associated with this time because you don't really know what around the corner.

Then again, that's a really good thing. I wonder, if the apostles knew what was to come how many of them would have been game enter the upper room to start with. How

many of them would have retuned to their nets, their tax collection tables and wondered if this was really such a good idea after all. It's not easy to step out into the unknown. It really is easier to stay where we are and with the things that are comfortable, familiar and reassuring. The only problem is that if we stay there all the time, then we will not grow. We will not know new beginnings, we will just keep going the way we are until we're all gone.

M Scott Peck talks about a healthy marriage relationship in the way that we might talk about a healthy church. This is not new. Paul speaks about Christ taking the church as his bride. Peck says that in a healthy relationship the two parties encourage each other to go out and grow in their abilities, their talents, breaking down the walls that keep us hemmed in knowing that there is a safe place to return. In this way each of the parties becomes the best that they can be, fully mature, fully capable of facing all that life throws at them, fully independent but choosing to be together because that is the place where they are free to be themselves without judgment, without criticism, fully supported, fully love for who they are. They choose to be together just because it's good to be there.

If we stay huddled within the arms of our lover and never stretch ourselves then we won't grow, we won't develop and we'll choose to stay because we are too afraid to step out, too dependent on the other, too stuck in our ways. It does not mean that we can't enjoy that familiar place, it does not mean that we have to abandon those familiar places and occasions, it just means that we have to look beyond them, coming back to strengthen and revive but going out into the world to spread our wings and beat down some walls, to grow and develop to mature and grow so that we become more effective witnesses of the gospel.

If we really want to be the church that had its beginnings in the rushing of wind and flames and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit then we must be agents of new beginnings. We have to be the ones who go out into the streets and speak the gospel all who would hear but speak it in a language that they can understand. More and more those who have no experience of church simply do not understand the language and symbols of faith. The way we speak about our faith amongst ourselves has no reference point for them. We need to speak a new language in order to connect with them.

But more importantly we need to be the Holy Spirit holes in the Church. We need to be the ones through whom the spirit

flows and fills communities in which we live. And unlike the spirit holes in the churches of old we are not to be just symbols of the Holy Spirit coming into the world, we need to be agents of the Holy Spirit entering not only the world but the hearts and minds of those around us.

The great thing about Pentecost is that it shown us what a humble impetuous fisherman can do when the Spirit calls him out. Just imaging what God can do with you when he calls you and gives you a task to further the kingdom.

Robert Paget

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Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:26-36

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27;16:4b-15