**Today we celebrate Pentecost or in the old language it is Whit Sunday.**

**This is seen as the Birthday of the Christian Church**

When I was young, we used to have a ‘Whit Sunday’ walk from one end of the village to church. For some reason I recall it as always being sunny; perhaps my mother would not let us go in the rain? Or as we remember our August holidays we look back as though it was always sunny.

Pentecost has been incredibly significant for the church from the beginning, yet most people would not mention it as a great feast, especially compared with Christmas or Easter.

Today let us have another party and be thankful it has not been commercialised.

So why is it seen as the Birthday of the Christian Church? Read on…………….

Acts 2:1-11, part of the 1st reading for church today describes in detail the miraculous transformation that took place during the first Christian Pentecost, thus fulfilling Jesus’ promise to his apostles that they would receive “power from on high.” It is described to begin with “as a noise like a strong driving wind” and then as “tongues as of fire” resting on the disciples, and each of them was filled with the Holy Spirit. The first manifestation of their reception of the Holy Spirit came when the apostles began to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, and everyone there (regardless of their many different native languages), was able to understand them “in his own tongue.” Later, the Acts of the Apostles describes how the Holy Spirit empowered the early Christians to bear witness to Christ by their sharing love and strong Faith. This “anointing by the Holy Spirit” also strengthened the early Christian martyrs during the period of brutal persecution that followed.

*This strange occurrence drew a large crowd, and Peter stood up to speak to them about repentance and the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:14). By the end of the day that the Holy Spirit came, the Church grew by 3,000 people (Acts 2:41*). **This is why Christians still celebrate Pentecost.**

The Holy Spirit was prophesied in the Old Testament and promised by Jesus. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in John 14:26, who would be the Helper for his people.

*“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”*

This New Testament event is also significant because it fulfils an Old Testament prophecy in Joel 2:28-29.

*“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”*

Therefore: for Christians, Pentecost marks the end and the goal of the Easter season. The feast also commemorates the official inauguration of the Christian Church with the apostolic preaching of Peter, which resulted in the conversion of 3000 Jews to the Christian Faith. Pentecost is, thus, the official birthday of the Church which Jesus established nearly 2,000 years ago.

For Pentecost (especially when children are present in church) I have used re-lighting candles on a birthday cake.

A Birthday Cake because it is the Birthday of the Church, and re-lighting candles because the description was as of flames, and re-lighting shows that the Holy Spirit cannot be blown out*.*

Pentecost is an event of both the past and the present. The gift of the Holy Spirit is something to be shared with others. In other words, the readings remind us that the gift of the Holy Spirit moves its recipients to action and inspires them to share this gift with others.

The second reading (I Cor 12:3-13) is Paul explaining how the sharing of the various spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit enriches the Church. He refers to the varieties of gifts given to the Church as coming from the same Spirit. The spirit activates all of them in Christians for the common good. They are described as the gifts or fruit of the Spirit. They may take different forms like prophecy, teaching, administrating, doing acts of charity, healing, and speaking in tongues. These gifts and fruits may be given to different persons like apostles, prophets, teachers, healers and so on. Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in his Letter to the Galatians “What the Spirit brings is … love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (5:22). He continues, “Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit” (5:25). Paul insists that these spiritual gifts are to be used in the present time (then and now) for the benefit of others, for the common good, and for the building up of the Body of Christ in His church

**What or who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit, the Helper is always quietly at work: seen in the sincere concern of a friend for our health; in the generosity of those who give us so much help; in the inner strength we discover in times of crisis; in those moments when we admit that we have been wrong; in the making of a tough choice; in the resilience of people who face one bad thing after another without turning away; in the times when we have dared to love even though it was hard to do so.

The Holy Spirit, the Helper, is quietly at work: in our taking on responsibilities that we once thought beyond us; in our refusing to let the greed of society take over our soul; in our giving thanks always, even though times have been hard; in our rising above past failures and putting past hurts behind us; in our finding a central core of peace in the midst of turmoil; in an adult patiently teaching a child self-esteem and self-control; in the person sitting quietly beside a hospital bed; in a parent praying for a troubled son or daughter.

The Spirit calls us to repentance, to turn our lives around; He calls us to Faith and to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Wherever we look, we see the Holy Spirit, helping us to become what God made us to be, and to be truly great — humble servants of one another. Likewise, the Spirit promotes Jesus in our lives; He gathers us around the cross of Jesus; He changes our lives, helping us to be more patient and forgiving, to seek new beginnings in our relationships with one another and to let the power of God’s love have the final say over the conflicts we get into. He is available to us every moment of every day as we face the choices between being self-centred or being the God-centred people, whom God has created us, and the Spirit has called us, to be in Christ.

*A Story for us: “Lower your bucket– taste and see”:*

*From (Fr. Tony (http://frtonyshomilies.com/)*

*More than a century ago, a great sailing ship was stranded off the coast of South America. Week after week the ship lay there in the still waters with not a hint of a breeze. The captain was desperate; the crew was dying of thirst. And then, on the far horizon, a steamship appeared, headed directly toward them. As it drew near, the captain called out, “We need water! Give us water!” The steamship replied, “Lower your buckets where you are.” The captain was furious at this cavalier response but called out again, “Please, give us water.” But the steamer gave the same reply, “Lower your buckets where you are!” And with that they sailed away! The captain was beside himself with anger and despair, and he went below. But a little later, when no one was looking, a sailor lowered a bucket into the sea and then tasted what he brought up: It was perfectly sweet, fresh water! For you see, the ship was just out of sight of the mouth of the Amazon. And for all those weeks they had been sitting right on top of all the fresh water they needed!*

*What we are really seeking , the One Whom we have been seeking all our lives, is already inside us, waiting to be discovered, waiting to be embraced: the Holy Spirit of God Who has been living within us from the moment of our Baptism. The Holy Spirit is saying to us at this very moment from deep in our heart, “Lower your buckets where you are. Taste and see!” Come, Holy Spirit! Fill our hearts and set us on fire! Amen.*