

Solemnity of Pentecost

Homily

About 500 yards from where I'm standing on the corner of Hearsall Common stands a small blue Coventry heritage plaque bearing the words:

On this common Frank Whittle, Jet Pioneer, first felt the power of flight, 1916.

It refers to Whittle's favourite childhood pastime of flying kites over the breezy expanse of Hearsall Common. But 20 years later he would become famous for flying of a very different kind.

By 1930 Whittle had designed and patented his jet engine, and in April 1937 the first engine was ground-tested. According to Whittle it "made a noise like an air raid siren" causing onlookers to run for cover. Nevertheless, the demonstration was successful and the first aircraft to be propelled with Whittle's pioneering engineering took flight.

There's no blue plaque in an upper room in Jerusalem to commemorate it, but with the jet propulsion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the community of the resurrection – the Church – first took flight. The power, the energy, the divine life of the Holy Spirit gave the followers of Jesus wings.

In the reading from Acts this morning, we hear that the Spirit "filled the entire house", and then the apostles were "all filled with the Holy Spirit". Such was the **thrust** of the event, that they spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem where they spoke in the languages of the known world. Peter reminded the sceptics in the crowd, who thought the disciples were drunk, what the prophet Joel prophesied - God will pour out his spirit upon all flesh – even upon the slaves, both men and women and they shall prophesy. The divine breath of the Holy Spirit was unleashed to renew the face of the earth.

It is important for us to understand that Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. The Pentecost event gave the Church its initial drive for its mission, but Pentecost is the celebration of what must happen and *does* happen to the Church today. The same Spirit continues to blow and blaze through today's church to give life and direction to our mission and ministry to preach the gospel and to proclaim forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ's name.

The life, the energy, the thrust of the Holy Spirit propels us outwards, like the early Church. This is not a divine energy restricted to some movements and denominations that go by the label of charismatic or Pentecostal. It is given to all of us.

The biblical record in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that there is a **posture** adopted by those who are ready to receive God's power.

One aspect of that posture is of **being together in one place**. The disciples met together and so must we. I hope and pray that lockdown doesn't lead us to believe that we can go it alone as Christians and fend for ourselves, because we can't be Lone Rangers in the Christian life. We need our brothers and sisters. There's no substitute for the Christian community. It's in and through the life of the Church that we receive the Holy Spirit.

A second aspect of the posture is of **being in a spirit of prayer**. We need times together in prayer, and we need times alone in prayer. We need to open our hearts to God, allowing God to capture our attention. Some of us are so busy running around doing things that we haven't taken the time to listen, to be still, to be open, to receive that divine power and energy that God wants to give us through His Spirit.

And a third aspect is of **waiting expectantly for God to act**. Is there that dimension of waiting in your life? The disciples were told to wait until they received power from on high: We also need to spend time waiting in God's presence. We usually call that prayer - stilling our thoughts, opening ourselves to God, making ourselves available to God and trusting that God will guide and direct us.

Let's promise ourselves and God this morning that we will spend a little more time in waiting, in praying and in listening for God, and take flight by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of the Faithful

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Let us pray for the whole Church: that the strong wind of the Holy Spirit's coming may surge through the upper room where we have waited, to kindle in us his holy fire.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that the Spirit's gift of fortitude may make us strong friends of Christ, able to stand up for the demands of the Gospel.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for our country at this time of uncertainty: that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in his straight path we may not stumble.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that the Spirit may be an anointing of comfort to the sorrowful, healing to the sick, forgiveness to sinners, and refreshment to us all on our pilgrim way.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for the faithful departed, especially for Michael Lowe whose funeral takes place tomorrow: that the Lord, who sent his Spirit into their souls, may grant them a place in his new creation.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

In a moment of silence let us offer our own prayers and intentions to the Lord.

Silence.

Almighty God, who on the day of Pentecost sent your Holy Spirit to the apostles with the wind from heaven and in tongues of flame, filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel: by the power of the same Spirit strengthen us to witness to your truth and to draw everyone to the fire of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.