



Homily for the Mass for New Catholics

Pentecost Sunday - 9th June 2019

Cardiff Cathedral: St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Archbishop George Stack

Every person in this Cathedral knows from experience that we live in an age of instant communication, a world of twenty-four hour worldwide news, a world of Facebook and Twitter, emails and flickr. The number of words we hear and use, the volume of information we are supposed to digest, to say nothing of the fake news that comes our way, can easily overwhelm or even paralyse us. What can I do about this refugee crisis, or that suppression of human rights, or the famine and disease and natural disaster which has taken so many lives. And when we try to unravel and decipher the many words used in political discourse, the language of politics, it becomes even harder. I will never forget when a president of the United States of America admitted to a “terminological inexactitude” when it was discovered he had told a lie.

Words and language and the information they convey are meant to be the means and the substance of communication and truth. Yet they can easily obfuscate be distorted in order to mask the truth, to confuse and manipulate people. I think Johnny Nash was correct when he sang in 1972 *“There are more questions than answers, and the more I find out the less I know”*.

This feast of Pentecost is a contradiction of all that. First of all, we celebrate the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus that he would send his Spirit into the world and into the Church to teach us wisdom, knowledge, understanding. We also describe the gifts of God's Spirit as right judgement and courage and fear of the Lord. The word fear needs to be explored another time. "Timor Domini" in reality means respect, wonder, awe. Not the limited frightening aspect it conveys in today's language. God's gift of Himself through his Holy Spirit can be summed up in the words Truth and Love. These aren't words just to be spoken and analysed and understood. These are values to be lived in the great decisions in life as well as the small. I love one of the prayers in Sunday Mass which says *"Teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and measure them by the things of heaven"*. God's spirit comes to us not just to inform us but to transform our lives.

The scripture readings for today's Mass explore that reality. People from every nation and background and walk of life in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Pentecost – the feast of the first fruits of the harvest. *"There were devout men from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem"* we read in the Acts of the Apostles. And then the symbolic language of wind and fire stripping away prejudices, purifying the mixed motives and false judgments about not just of the disciples but of myself,

about other people, about our priorities, about our values, about our world and our responsibility for its well-being. Human ecology is as important as the ecology of nature.

“How is it that we can hear them, understand the, preaching and speaking in our own language of the wonders of God?”

Because this is a universal language. This is the message of peace and harmony, the message of living my life not just for myself but for the good of others, the desire and willingness to open myself up a bit and share my time, talent, energy, compassion, forgiveness with others. Even though it is risky and is in danger of taking us out of our comfort zone, that is the wind of the Holy Spirit which blows fresh air into our lives and takes our breath away. Unless we batten down the hatches, of course

Those of you who have been baptised and received into the Church at Easter will have listened to the Spirit of God speaking in the silence of your own hearts. Often you cannot put into words what has brought you here and why you have responded to that invitation. But you know in your heart of hearts this is where you should be. Don't worry about explanations, not least because the real mystery of our faith goes beyond words, goes deeper than words. That is why in the Church we use the language of sign, symbol and sacrament. Water. Bread. Wine. Oil. The healing hand of

forgiveness. In Baptism, Holy Communion, Confirmation, anointing, Marriage, Ordination. God brings into reality the things we believe in. *“This is my Body, given for you. My Blood poured out for you”*. Come into Communion with me through the self-sacrificing love I have for you. You are a person of infinite value and infinite worth. Infinitely loveable. Infinitely forgivable. It is a lesson each of us must learn for ourselves before we can invest others with the same respect as children of God. As Jesus said from the cross to the great mystic Julian of Norwich: *“What more could I have done for you. If I could have done more, I would have done more”*.

“How is it that we can all hear them speak in our own language of the wonders of God?”. Because the language of God is not limited to words. God’s actions speak louder than words.

One of my favourite hymns contains the words:

If you listen, you will hear me.

Glory Jesus Christ.

But not listen in a noisy world with the volume turned up high. Listen in the silence of your heart. Make space in that place, not least by listening to your own breathing, or your

heartbeat, or even your peace. And it is in that silent listening that heart will truly speak to heart. WE call it prayer.
