

Pentecost Message of Bishop Peter Brignall.

Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains but a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.'(Jn.12:24)

From where does that single grain come, if not but from the full ear of the previous harvest? What has been fruit in one year, becomes the seed for the next, fruitfulness gives way to death which in turn produces new life, new fruit.

The present time in the life of the Church is a little like that.

The fruit of fidelity in past generations has become the seed for new life in our own.

This solemn feast of Pentecost which historically in the Jewish calendar is an agricultural festival used as the vehicle of the commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt.Sinai. The marking of the end of the life of slavery in Egypt and the beginning and anticipation of the new life of freedom in the promised land is symbolised with thanksgiving at the beginning of the wheat or grain harvest; a true giving thanks in humble belief for what they were about to receive; a giving thanks to the God who reveals himself through obedience to and living with fidelity to his word and command contained within the Law.

In that context the apostles together with the women and Mary were at prayer in obedience to the word of Jesus and into which scene bursts the Holy Spirit. The Church is born, new life is given, a complete revelation of the Father's love has begun through obedience to the full understanding of Jesus' teaching and the command to go to the whole world to complete the Father's mission for his Son.

As Church we have been and are the fruits of the harvest of faith of our parents, grandparents and generations beyond, now we are to be the seed for new life in the Church as we begin to look for the way out of lockdown in this time of pandemic. In different ways we have all had to experience something of a death, a denying of access to our church buildings but not ceasing to be church; not being able to celebrate the Mass and receive Holy Communion, but not

ceasing to be a ‘royal priesthood, holy nation and people consecrated to God’; the celebration of Masses by solitary priests on their own, but not ceasing to be shepherd and teacher to their flocks; not being able to gather together as the body of Christ, but not ceasing to minister and find new ways to care for our each other and especially our more frail and vulnerable members and simple to be that body.

Despite the deprivations we begin to look for new life, conscious that it been the public and private prayer, reading of the scriptures, following traditional devotions, the participating in services of reflection and attending to the Church’s Liturgy courtesy of 21st century technology over nearly three months that now enables us to burst into life again as Church and produce a new harvest to the glory of God and the growth of the Church.

I have been hugely encouraged by the resourcefulness of individuals and communities to be brother and sister in the Lord to one another as well as to remain a spiritual force in the world. Those blessings and gifts we must not loose in the coming months and even years as we live with the coronavirus in a different way, until such time as it is eradicated or an affective vaccine is discovered, and made, and administered to all.

In the foreseeable future, life will not be the same as it was before Lent, it is not going to be a return to how it was in the past. Social distancing, health, hygiene and bio-security restrictions are going to make life for churchgoers difficult. There will be one way traffic in churches, a way in and away out, restrictions on the numbers of people allowed into church at any one time and the distances between them; extra cleaning of surfaces; regular use of hand sanitizer and possibly much more.

BUT in these past months we have discovered new ways of being Church – the disciples of Jesus, and that is what Pentecost is all about. As we have been inspired in the last months so we believe we will be in the coming years – the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, grows and brings forth a new harvest.

The despondent disciples, inspired by the Holy Spirit become a new and vital group, moving from their relative isolation in the upper room to the street corners and market places of Jerusalem to proclaim the Resurrection; going to the Temple and taking their places in the Synagogues, but with a new message. In the coming months we have that same opportunity as slowly restrictions are lifted and the death through which we have lived will produce a new harvest of holiness , witness and good works all to the glory of the Father. At the same time we should not lose some of our discoveries with technology to live, witness too and proclaim our faith. With more or less success we have ZOOMed and live-streamed, telephone network have been created to care for and keep the housebound and vulnerable in touch. At the heart of all there has been a renewed interest in the reading of the bible; a discovery or re-discovery of the Church's in Liturgical prayer and devotion. This already a fruit of lockdown and I must say of the godwhospeaks project inspired by the 1600th anniversary of the death of S.Jerome and the 10th anniversary of Verbum Domini, P. Benedict's exhortation on the Word of God. That project continues despite the restrictions, with new resources constantly being uploaded and made available.

In other years, this day, 31st May would be celebrated in the Church as the feast of the Visitation. Mary having been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and conceived the child Jesus takes him in her womb to her cousin Elizabeth also with child. Mary is Jesus' first apostle and now at Pentecost she is with the Apostle and Jesus' disciples as they receive the Holy Spirit, the peace of Jesus and his command, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."

Seeking Mary's guidance to us as a witness to her Son the Risen Lord Jesus we pray for the full gift of the Holy Spirit:
Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O holy Spirit, that my work, too may be holy
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I may love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, the O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

With the assurance of my continued prayers I wish you a blessed and fruitful Pentecost,

+Peter