



EASTBOURNE CATHOLIC CHURCHES

A new magazine for our parishes

HAPPY PENTECOST!

Welcome to the first edition of *Eastbourne Catholic Churches*!

At Pentecost, we celebrate as the birthday of the universal Church, which throughout history binds so many diverse people into one Body of Christ. What better time than this to remind us ourselves of our unity as Catholic Christians here in our town and beyond— and we hope that this new magazine will help us to do just that!

Eastbourne Catholic Churches is a new kind of newsletter by which we hope to share the joy of our faith across all our local churches and parish communities, to be published every so often throughout the year. We hope you enjoy it and find something here to inspire and refresh you in your faith journey, particularly while we cannot gather physically due to the current lockdown.

Wishing you every blessing for the season of the Holy Spirit!

Fr Neil Chatfield
Fr Tristan Cranfield
Fr Raglan Hay-Will
Fr Thomas Mason



IN THIS ISSUE

- The ongoing story of Pentecost
- Reflection on the Pentecost liturgy
- Continuing the spiritual life in Ordinary Time
- Pentecost traditions and art
- Family prayer ideas and activities
- Praying for the future
- St John Paul II on Mary, Mother of the Church

CONTACT US

Our Lady of Ransom RC Church,
& St Gregory, with St Agnes
(Diocese of Arundel & Brighton)
01323 723222
info@ransomagnes.org

Christ the King & St Joachim
(and the Ordinariate of Our
Lady of Walsingham)
01323 760048
priest.ck@icloud.com

Left: Bp Richard prepares to consecrate Mary-Rose Bracuti as a virgin at OLR; one of the many moments where we have witnessed the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

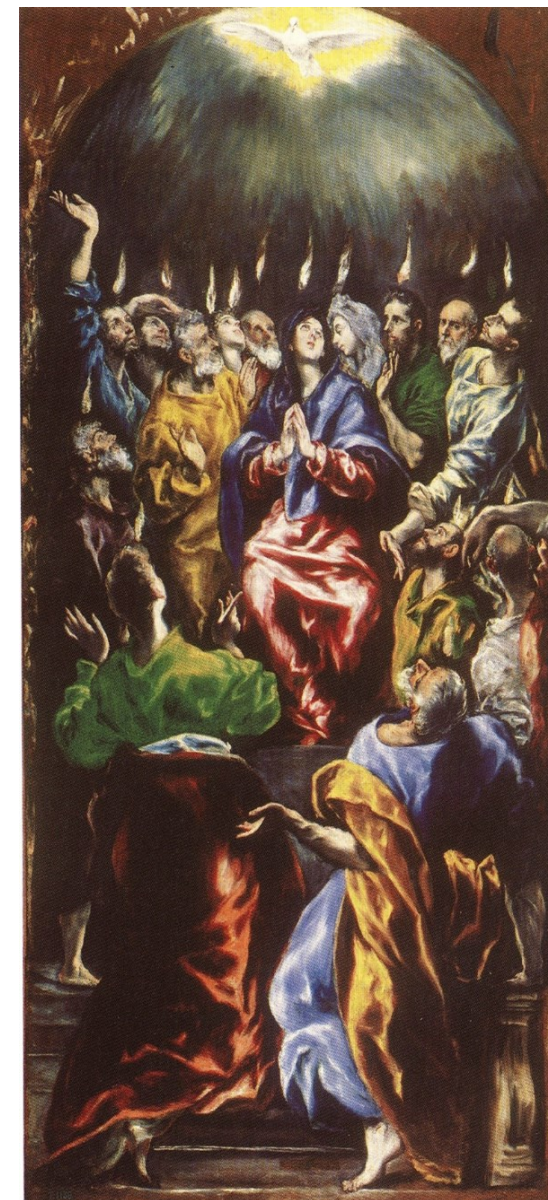
Source: <http://aandblog.blogspot.com/2019/01/eastbourne-parishioner-becomes.html>

Published online at ourladyofransom.org.uk
christthekingchurch.org.uk

JUNE 2020 /
PENTECOST

'THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD HAS FILLED THE WHOLE WORLD': THE STORY OF PENTECOST

by Fr Thomas Mason



Above: "Pentecost", El Greco (1541-1614), ©Museo del Prado, Madrid (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/El_Greco_006.jpg)

When the day of Pentecost had come, the Apostles were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

We all hear the name of 'Pentecost', and we know that it is one of the major feasts of the Church's year, but it is worth pausing to reflect a little more deeply on it and what it can mean for our lives today and our journey with the Lord.

As that quotation from Acts makes clear, this was not something new - Pentecost was already a feast within the Jewish nation, but it was a feast whose meaning was about to be transformed as Christianity was born.

The 'Feast of Weeks' fell fifty days after the Passover, and so gained the Greek name 'Pentecost', and this was celebrated as a double feast: it marked the beginning of the harvest when God would be thanked by giving him the first-fruits of that harvest (Deut 26:1-15), and also the annual celebration of God's giving the Law to the Sons of Israel through Moses. Both of these illustrated the way the God cared for his people — by making the land productive and so giving them the food they needed to live; and by giving them the law which guided them and was seen as illustrating God's presence among his people (cf. Deuteronomy 4:1-8). It was for this feast that so many people had gathered in Jerusalem on that day which became the first Christian Pentecost.

If the Jewish feast of Pentecost marks God's presence among his people, his providing for them, and his guiding them through their lives, the Christian feast of Pentecost marks God's doing so in a new and vastly more powerful manner, fulfilling all of the promises of the Old Testament (e.g., Ezek 36:26-27).

As Our Lady and the Apostles were gathered together, completing their novena of prayer, they received this powerful new gift from God. No longer an external set of laws, but now a power which reached deep within them; which touched their hearts, and inspired them from the very centre of their being.

As we hear about the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the first thing which strikes us is the sheer immensity of the power. 'A sound from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind...tongues of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.' (Acts 2:2-3) This is God's power coming upon them in a truly dramatic

fashion; working within them to perform mighty works: 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' (Acts 2:4)

“...a power which reached deep within them; which touched their hearts, and inspired them from the very centre of their being.”

We are now given a full revelation of God as the Trinity: as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes as a distinct person, but also comes with divine power. This follows from the revelation of Christ as truly God in the Gospels; now we are shown that the Holy Spirit is also truly God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 732).

The effect which this descent of the Holy Spirit has on the Apostles is immediate and profound. Straight away St Peter stands up and preaches boldly to the crowds gathered at the Temple for the feast (Acts 2:14-36). This the same St Peter who denied even knowing Christ a few days earlier — but he now speaks with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not just a single event, it has continued ever since. Christ had promised that the Holy Spirit would come, and that through the working of the Holy Spirit, He would be with us to guide us until the end of time (Matt 28:20), and that the Holy Spirit would guide us and bring us into all truth (Jn 16:8-14).

This is why we often refer to Pentecost as 'the birthday of the Church'. The Church was founded by Christ to carry out his mission - but if she is to do so, then she needs Christ's power working in her, supporting her and ensuring that she does not stray into error. This is what is given at Pentecost - and which continues to this day. The work of the Holy Spirit supports the Church as she continues to proclaim Christ to the world. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which 'makes' the Sacraments - as the Priest pours water over a baby's head or recites the words of Christ over bread and wine, as a man and woman promise married fidelity to each other, in each of these cases it is the Holy Spirit which

actually baptises the small baby, which actually transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, which actually unites that man and woman in marriage.

So we see that as those ancient Hebrews celebrated God's presence and guidance among them in the Law, and when they gave thanks for the fruits of the earth which gave them nourishment, all of this was pointing forward to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the new Israel. The Holy Spirit now offers us God's presence in our lives (most especially through the Sacraments); the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and writes God's law on our hearts; and the Holy Spirit gives us the nourishment which we need to live a good life in union with God. This is what Pentecost is all about; and as we celebrate it, we should pray fervently for an ever-greater presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

CATHOLIC CUSTOMS

The Dove —the form the Holy Ghost took at Christ's Baptism — is the primary symbol of the day. In medieval times, there even used to be "Holy Ghost Holes" in the roofs of some churches from which a dove — real or a model — would be lowered over the congregation as trumpets sounded or the choir mimicked the sounds of rustling winds. When the dove descended, red rose petals or, incredibly, pieces of burning straw, symbolising the "tongues of flame" in Acts, would shower down. The shower of rose petals is still carried out each year in Rome, through the hole in the roof of the Pantheon Church, by the local fire brigade!



Above: "Rose Petals at the Pantheon" © Wanted in Rome, 3 June 2017. Source: <https://www.wantedinrome.com/news/rose-petals-at-the-pantheon-2.html>

BEAUTY IN LITURGY

Nicholas Harden, a seminarian on placement here in Eastbourne, writes about the importance of the Pentecost Sequence.

In Confession a few years ago, my Spiritual Director gave me the penance of praying the Pentecost Sequence. At the time this was a part of the liturgy that I had paid little attention to. I was struck by this profoundly exquisite meditation on the actions of the Holy Spirit and was particularly moved by the supplicatory stanzas seven and eight, which contain those wonderful lines, 'Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill.'

It seems particularly appropriate to reflect on the Holy Spirit following the Sacrament of Reconciliation, given that it is through the action of the divine Person, the 'Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 1433), that sin is brought to light. It is the same 'Lord of Light' who 'helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words' (Rom 8:26).

The Sequence is a hymn that prays that the Holy Spirit who 'searches everything, even the depths of God' (1 Cor 2:10), may shine into our hearts and grant healing, forgiveness, strength, and salvation. His grace softens souls like rain showers soften the arid soil and allow seed to germinate. Saint Irenaeus put this more sublimely in writing, 'like parched ground, which yields no harvest unless it receives moisture, we

THE PENTECOST SEQUENCE

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte caelitus
lucis tuae radium.*

Holy Spirit, Lord of Light,
From the clear celestial height.
Thy pure beaming radiance give.

*Veni, pater pauperum,
veni, dator munerum,
veni, lumen cordium.*

Come, thou Father of the poor,
Come, with treasures which endure;
Come, thou Light of all that live!

*Consolator optime,
dulcis hospes animae,
dulce refrigerium.*

Thou, of all consolers best,
Thou, the soul's delightful guest,
Dost refreshing peace bestow.

*In labore requies,
in aestu temperies,
in fletu solatium.*

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;
Pleasant coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.

*O lux beatissima,
reple cordis intima
tuorum fidelium.*

Light immortal, Light divine,
Visit thou these hearts of thine,
And our inmost being fill.

*Sine tuo numine,
nihil est in homine,
nihil est innoxium.*

If thou take thy grace away,
Nothing pure in man will stay;
All his good is turned to ill.

*Lava quod est sordidum,
riga quod est aridum,
sana quod est saucium.*

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour thy dew,
Wash the stains of guilt away.

*Flecte quod est rigidum,
fove quod est frigidum,
rege quod est devium.*

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.

*Da tuis fidelibus,
in te confidentibus,
sacrum septenarium.*

Thou, on us who evermore
Thee confess and thee adore,
With thy sevenfold gifts descend.

*Da virtutis meritum,
da salutis exitum,
da perenne gaudium.
Amen. Alleluia.*

Give us comfort when we die;
Give us life with thee on high;
Give us joys that never end.
Amen. Alleluia.

who were once like a waterless tree could never have lived and borne fruit without this abundant rainfall from above' (*Against the Heresies*, iii, 17).

Apart from their meditative value, the history of the use of Sequences is worthy of consideration. These poetic, non-biblical compositions are thought to have originated in the ninth century as musical accompaniments to lengthy Gospel processions, expounding on the theme of the Alleluia verse; "hymnal proclamations of the feast's central event" (Guardini, R., *Meditations before Mass*, tr. E. Castendyk Briefs, Indiana 2014, p. 77). In this way our Sequence for Pentecost builds on the Alleluia verse, 'Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.'

By the time of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), tasked with reform of the Church as part of the Counter Reformation, many hundreds of Sequences had been composed. In some places, a proper Sequence would have been sung every Sunday and holyday, except for the period from Septuagesima (beginning two weeks before Lent) to Easter, when the Alleluia and Sequence were replaced by the Tract.

Many of the liturgical reforms of the Council of Trent were embodied in the 1570 Roman Missal of Pope (Saint) Pius V. This limited the number of Sequences to four:

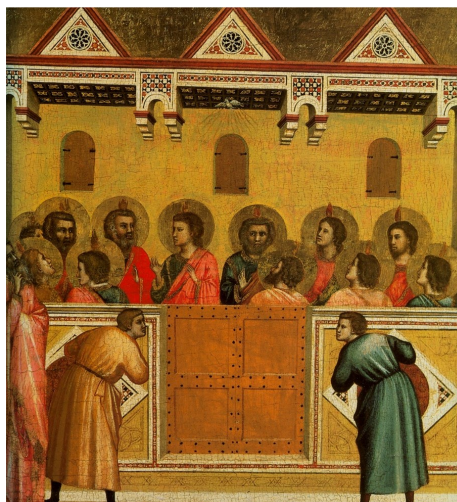
- *Victimæ paschali laudes* (octave of Easter)
- *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* (octave of Pentecost)
- *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem* (octave of Corpus Christi)
- *Dies iræ* (All Souls Day and Requiem Masses)

A fifth Sequence, the *Stabat Mater dolorosa* was added to the Missal in 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII for the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows (the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Sequences for Easter and Pentecost are prescribed on their respective Sundays, whereas the Sequence of Corpus Christi (composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas) and that of Our Lady of Sorrows

and are both optional. The *Dies iræ* was removed entirely. I do wonder whether we are left more spiritually impoverished as a result of our liturgical minimalization.

A mere ninety-five words make up the ten succinct stanzas of the Latin Sequence for Pentecost. It is a glorious meditation on the guidance provided by the Holy Spirit and is abundant with images worthy of contemplation. So esteemed is it that it is termed the 'Golden Sequence.' Most historians agree that this deeply moving Latin masterpiece was written by Stephen Langton (1150-1228), Archbishop of Canterbury (1207-1228), a man also credited with having divided the Bible into chapters. (He has a link with our diocese in that he died in Slindon, near Chichester.)



Above: "Pentecost", Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337), ©National Gallery, London
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Giotto_Pentecost_1320-25_National_Gallery%2C_London.jpg

Looking at the Sequence itself, the repetition of *nihil est* in stanza six emphasises the essence of the subject; absolutely nothing is possible without the Spirit. Having established this, further use of this technique is made in the following two stanzas with repetition of *quod est* (all that which is) six times. Each one sandwiches together the totally unmerited gifts that God provides to us in our neediness. It emphasises the infinite distance separating God from man. For instance, '*riga quod est aridum*,' prays that God should 'saturate' all that is 'arid' in us. The infinite divide separating God from man is transcended through the ineffable gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many titles of the Holy Spirit are enumerated: 'Lord of Light', 'Father of the poor', 'consoler best', 'comfort sweet', 'Light divine' and 'giver of grace' (*inter alia*). These images point to the activities of the ebullient, omnibenevolent, and uncontainable Spirit. These remind me of the chapter, 'The playfulness of the Liturgy' in Romano Guardini's book, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, in which he reflects on the delight of God in the Mass:

"The liturgy has laid down the serious rules of the sacred game which the soul plays before God. And, if we are desirous of touching bottom in this mystery, it is the Spirit of fire and of holy discipline "Who has knowledge of the world" - the Holy Ghost - Who has ordained the game which the Eternal Wisdom plays before the Heavenly Father in the Church, Its kingdom on

earth. And "Its delight" is in this way "to be with the children of men."' (R. Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, tr. A. Lane, Eastford, 2018, p. 77)

The Holy Spirit delights to spend time with us. We experience this particularly through the very personal and intimate encounter with Him in the grace we receive in the Sacraments. Through the actions of the Holy Spirit (grace), liturgy causes us to 'grow into living works of art before God, with no other aim or purpose than that of living and existing in His sight' (*ibid.*). It is through the liturgy that we learn better who the Spirit is and are drawn ever deeper into that participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity. I find St Augustine's analogy particularly helpful here, with the Father as the Lover, the Son as the Beloved and the Holy Spirit as the Love that unites them. We participate in this union through love.

Through the indwelling of the Spirit we become the missionary presence of the risen Christ. 'It was love that was to bring the Church of God together all over the world' (Gregory of Agrigentum, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*) and we must remain open to having the Spirit work through us to make God's life and saving grace present for others.

As the Sequence makes clear, we have been granted that 'pure beaming radiance,' 'our inmost being' has been filled. Keeping this joy to ourselves is not an option. As St Basil reflected:

'Just as a sunbeam, falling on light and transparent bodies, makes them exceedingly bright and causes them to pour forth a brilliance from themselves, so too souls which bear the Spirit and are illuminated by the Spirit become spiritual themselves and send forth grace to others' (St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*)

The impulsion to pass on this grace to others is the way the Holy Spirit works through us, fanning the flames of faith and causing the Word of God to spread like wildfire.

During the challenges of this time we seek 'solace in the midst of woe.' Turning to the 'Counsellor' (Jn 14:16) whom Jesus promised us, praying the Sequence for Pentecost becomes a very fruitful activity. May the 'Quiet guest of our soul', who 'dost refreshing peace bestow,' 'give us joys that never end.' Amen.



PENTECOST VELVET CUPCAKES

Ingredients 150g plain flour • 1 tbsp cocoa powder • 1 tsp

bicarbonate of soda • 50g butter, softened • 150g caster sugar • 1 large egg • 1 tsp vanilla paste • 100ml buttermilk • or kefir • 50ml vegetable oil • 1 tsp white wine vinegar • 1 tbsp red gel food colouring • • **For the cream cheese icing** • 100g slightly salted butter, softened • 225g icing sugar • 100g full fat cream cheese, stirred to loosen

Method • Line a cupcake tin with 12 cupcake cases and set aside. Heat oven to 180C/ 160C fan/gas 4. Sieve the flour, cocoa, bicarb and a pinch of fine salt into a medium bowl and mix to combine. • Using a stand mixer or an electric hand whisk, beat together the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, then beat in the egg, vanilla, buttermilk, oil and vinegar until combined. Gradually mix the wet ingredients into the dried. Once combined, mix in the red food colouring until you have a deep red mix – the colour may vary depending on what brand you use. • Divide the batter between the cupcake cases and bake for 15 mins, or until a skewer inserted into the centre of a cake comes out clean. • While the cakes are cooling, make the icing. Beat together the butter and icing sugar using an electric whisk or by hand until pale and fluffy, about 3 mins, then beat in the cream cheese for a further 1-2 mins until well combined. • Once the cakes are cool, use a piping bag fitted with a star nozzle to cover the cakes with the cream cheese icing, or dollop the icing on top using a spoon.

Source: <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/red-velvetcupcake>

KEEPING THE SPIRIT

Fr Raglan Hay-Will reflects on how to take our prayer life forward into the season of Ordinary Time

Easter comes to its climax at Pentecost, when the apostles are filled with the same divine Spirit that raised Jesus from death. Not just for their own benefit, but to bring this new life to the world.

Straight after Pentecost we pass abruptly into so-called 'Ordinary Time', all the way up to Advent. Is there any way of living our faith in the coming months which is not an anti-climax?

For a start, with the COVID-19 pandemic we know the world and all our lives will be different, although we don't know exactly how. As for the first disciples, we know that a new reality is coming to birth. We also know by faith that God is in it

“*St Basil described the Spirit in terms of the water you put on a garden; you never see it, but secretly it nourishes the life of everything we do see.*”

even though not everything is God's precise wish, because He permits human free will to play out.

How can we see where God is in all this? The sacraments are the place to start, even if we don't quite know yet how we're going to celebrate Mass together again. In the sacraments Jesus meets us; but there is often a double-take where we don't recognise him, and then we do. He came as close as possible to us in his birth at Christmas yet throughout his life displayed an 'otherness' that surprised people. After Easter the risen Jesus is recognised by the disciples, but sometimes only after a time. At Ascension he gives a further challenge, that they will recognise him in their lives, but not in a visible way. After some major Feasts on Sundays immediately after Pentecost, we settle into following a particular Gospel at Mass and this year it is Matthew. In that Gospel the risen Jesus tells the women who first see him after the Resurrection, "Go and tell my brothers that they

must leave for Galilee; there they will see me" (28:10). They are being directed back from Jerusalem to their own home area where it all began. Where is Galilee for you?

The poet George Herbert (1593-1633) said that 'Prayer' is the way we see "Heaven in ordinarie". (A fascinating man, born to an aristocratic family, educated at Cambridge, and with all kinds of career prospects before him, he preferred in the end to become a humble country parson at Bemerton near Salisbury). You have to find a prayer routine that works for you, and if little 'windows' of five minutes are all that's possible, so be it. (The first five minutes are always the most difficult).

Morning time and evening are the two 'poles' of the day, significant 'borderline' times when day and night are alternating. Many people start with the Morning Offering. There is the traditional "O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, sufferings of this day, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world". Alternatively, a dear departed friend Gerry Coleman adapted some verses from the life of John the Baptist in the Gospels: "Lord, today may I 'behold the Lamb of God' (John 1:35); may I 'do penance' (Matt. 3:8); and may I 'leap with joy' (Luke 1:45)".

Similarly, it is valuable to find time in the evening or night-time to look back on the day, bring the failures and hurts to God for healing, and on even the gloomiest day think of one thing that was a blessing. Finally, I recall a delegate at a student Christian conference saying something which has always stuck with me: "If we don't put God in the middle of our day, we are unlikely to put God at the centre of our lives". Try and find a space for prayer during the day. Mealtimes are a natural opportunity to say a Grace thanking God for all our blessings.

For craft activities with children on the theme of Pentecost, try this link:

<https://www.catholicicing.com/gifts-of-the-holyspirit/>

CATHOLIC CUSTOMS

The *Veni Sancte Spiritus* Sequence at in the Pentecost Mass, includes the words, 'Heal our wounds, our strength renew, on our dryness pour thy dew.' From this comes the custom, thought to bring blessings, of walking barefoot through the dew on Whitsunday morning. (Another custom, though one rarely practiced anymore, is "cheese rolling" by which people would race to see who could roll round cheeses downhill the fastest! This is — or at least was — done in England and Germany).

You may not manage all these times of prayer but find what works. I remember the late Fr. Charles Jeffries beginning a talk about prayer: "no-one can teach us to pray except the Holy Spirit" (see what St Paul says in Romans 8:26). The point of the sacraments, and all the different kinds of prayer, is to deepen our awareness of the divine Spirit at work throughout the week. In fact, the Jesuit Anthony de Mello wrote an entire book on prayer called simply 'Awareness'. St Basil described the Spirit in terms of the water we put on the garden: you never see it but secretly it nourishes the life of everything we do see. The Spirit is the invisible member of the Trinity:

whereas the Father is revealed in the Son ("To have seen me is to have seen the Father", John 14:9), and the Son is the image of the Father, the Spirit will remain invisible until the end of time. Donald Nicholl wrote of this:

"The Holy Spirit will not be manifested as person until the restoration of all things, until the final redemption. In that moment his image will be revealed as the whole company of saints taken together, all those who have been deified by the action of the Spirit. But even now, as St Paul tells us in that magnificent eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans, we are aware that all who are moved by the Spirit of God are already the sons and daughters of God, and that through our inarticulate groans of the whole creation the Spirit himself is pleading for us; and God, who searches our inmost being, knows what the Spirit means." (D. Nicholl, *The Beatitude of Truth*, London 1997, pp. 9-10)

Jesus was raised from the dead in the power of the Spirit. That mission of the apostles was to take that power into the world. At Pentecost the Spirit revealed what it meant to be created in the 'image and likeness' (Genesis 1:26) of God. The spiritual writers of early Christianity believed that the world will never be fully at rights, until we learn this as our deepest identity. So in the divine plan for the world, Pentecost is a beginning not an end.

PRAY WITH THE FAMILY

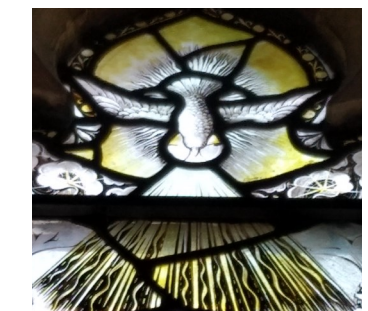
A grace to use before meals

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit:

Bless this food that it may restore our strength, giving new energy to tired limbs, new thoughts to weary minds. May this drink restore our souls, giving new vision to dry spirits, new warmth to cold hearts. And once refreshed,

may we give new pleasure to you, who gives us all, through Christ, Our Lord, Amen.

or: Bless us, Oh Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord.



Annunciation window, Our Lady of Ransom, detail. Photo: Rev T Cranfield

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in His consolation.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fr Tristan Cranfield ponders seven ways in which we could ask the Holy Spirit to guide the future of the Church in Eastbourne

Miss Joan Kennedy, long-time parishioner of Our Lady of Ransom, is a great source of wisdom, having seen so much change in our parish. The author of the history of the parish, she recently said to me that when the next book is written, the pandemic lockdown of Eastertide 2020 will certainly merit a chapter!

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church means that she is not just an institution belonging to past, but that her story is continually being written. She is eternal, yet moves and shifts here in time, constantly refreshed by direct contact with the life of God within the flow of time, as generation after generation discover anew for themselves Jesus, the King of Heaven, who stands at the door of hearts and knocks. The Church, likewise, is the bride our knocking on the door of eternal Bridegroom – and down the centuries she hears Him call again and again: “Come!” (cf Rev 3:20; 22:17)

The Church is the Body of Christ and His Bride, and as such she will live forever. However, with the current pandemic, events have given us a violent jolt to remind us that things do change, and they can affect how the Church has to respond to live out her mission. We stay still at our peril. As we come out of lockdown, the worst thing to do would be to just wish and hope that things will go back to how they were. In fact, well

before our church buildings closed, we knew as Catholics in England that there are problems that we need to face up to. Many have fallen away from their faith, and many have never discovered it. Getting back to the business of parish life without stopping to reflect would be, I think, to miss a great opportunity. In general, in the spiritual life, we never assume that everything is perfect; we are always in need of light and growth.

Any parish exists for one reason only: to share in the mission of Jesus Christ to save the world. They are to be places where we, all of us, meet Jesus, who died to save us from our sins, and receive His mercy. Our parishes are meant to help us become saints. They are designed to be the

“Our parishes are meant to help us become saints. They are designed to be the doorway to heaven!”

doorway to heaven! Bishop Richard has invited us to reflect on this as part of the pastoral plan *The Word Who Is Life*. He reminded us that the single purpose of the parish comprising three intertwined facets of “prayer” (the celebration of the sacraments, most of all the Mass), “formation” (learning and growing in relationship with Christ) and “mission” (sending us out to transform society with

Christ’s message). If anything in the parish does not serve this purpose, it will not grow. And moreover, where it does, it will only be because the Holy Spirit is truly directing hearts and hands.

Where will our parishes in Eastbourne be a year down the line, or ten years, or fifty years? Our congregations are shrinking, with fewer young children than ever carrying a practising faith with them into adulthood, and with that and a fewer number of adults living a lively sense of vocation which carries them into service of the church in the world, or in the religious life or priesthood. All this is likely to mean dramatic changes in the future as to how many church buildings we have and the shape of the Catholic community here in East Sussex.

Our belief in Jesus’s gift of the Spirit, which will never abandon the Church, enables us to be bold in how we conceive our future. If our hearts are fixed on how to convey the treasures of the Scriptures, the Mass, the life of the family home, the gift of forgiveness, the sacrifice of charity – in other words, the riches of what it means to be baptised to the next generation: we will be fulfilling Christ’s command, and we will flourish. But we can’t let holding on to any particular habits or institutions be at the expense of this – we cannot stop on the road, but must follow on in the Way just as Christ

teaches: “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Mt 8:20) ‘Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.’ (Lk 10:4)

No-one has the perfect solution! But I have a feeling that if we look to inspiration from the best of the past, as well as keeping our eyes open to the needs of our own society and times, we will find a way. We Eastbourne priests take a day every couple of months of so to have a coffee (and a pub lunch!), to pray, and share ideas. Here’s some of the thoughts we’ve had – thinking along with Bishop Richard’s concept of “prayer – formation – mission”. Why not pray about these too, and see what the Spirit has to say?

1. Faith is passed on in families. How can we emphasise the life of the family home (the domestic church) in our parishes? We are already preparing more materials to help this: in the Covid-19 era, it’s more important than ever. How can we help foster a Catholic identity and help children to discover that God has a special vocation in mind for each person?
2. Young people need to come to know Jesus. How could the daily routine of our priests change to give them more time to devote to St Thomas a Becket, St Richard’s, other schools and youth groups? How could we support this?
3. The existence of five churches in Eastbourne is unlikely to continue forever; especially with priests preparing to take on care of parishes outside the town too. We’re already started to work together as different Catholic communities on many projects – how can we continue to do this? Opportunities for spiritual growth can also be limited due to a lack of human resources/money in the parish – can we harness the talents of others beyond our Mass communities (looking to surrounding towns too)? How can we show that to contribute to the parish’s upbuilding is a duty of every member?
4. Many people fall away because the Mass becomes routine, and priests often flag in their energy and quality of preaching because of a plethora of Masses. Could we consolidate and make each Sunday liturgies more beautiful and nourishing events, by reducing them in number? As we come out of lockdown, it may be that certain people cannot attend Mass: how can we support their life of faith in the community? How can we rediscover the Mass’s importance?
5. Conversely, often Catholic practice is reduced to just “going to Mass”. This minimal approach doesn’t create a vibrant community or produce saints. How can we encourage a deepening of faith until it becomes part of everything we do? Sometimes ‘belonging’ doesn’t follow from ‘believing’ – how can we becoming a closer community of ‘intentional disciples’?
6. After receiving the sacraments of initiation, we often lose people again. How can we come to see the sacraments as part of a faith-filled life, not something reserved for special occasions?
7. The Internet is a vital means of evangelisation, catechesis and gathering people, as we’ve all discovered very tangibly during the lockdown. How can we improve our use of technology to promote prayer, formation and mission in the future?

There are seven points to pray about here; just as there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. You will think of many more. Christ’s faithful are endowed with these gifts and graces, and he gives them to us for a purpose. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to show us the way forward and proclaim the Gospel of Christ in Eastbourne with courage and love. Let’s take courage from the story of Pentecost, and may it continue in us even today.

“...[M]any wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:43-47)



Above: “Holy Spirit Coming”, He Qi (1951-), He Qi ©2014 All rights Reserved

Dr. He Qi is a Chinese artist whose works blend traditional Chinese folk customs and painting techniques with those of Western art. His fondness for medieval stained glass is reflected in the saturated, vibrant use of colour. Growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, he was sent as a teenager to work in the countryside as a farm labourer. Struggling with the hard work, He Qi found a job in his local area producing portraits of Chairman Mao, working as an artist for the regime. At night, though, he describes looking at art magazines and happening upon a painting of the Madonna and Child by Raphael. It was the peacefulness of this image that drew him to Christianity, although he was not able to pursue this interest at the time. Following 22 years as a professor at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, he has since 2004 lived in Minnesota with his family and produced many artworks based around Christian themes.

MARY, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Excerpts from St John Paul II's 1987 encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 26-27

[At Pentecost] there also begins that journey of faith, the Church's pilgrimage through the history of individuals and peoples. We know that at the beginning of this journey Mary is present. We see her in the midst of the Apostles in the Upper Room, 'prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit.'

In a sense her journey of faith is longer. The Holy Spirit had already come down upon her, and she became his faithful spouse at the Annunciation. [...] Mary 'goes before them', 'leads the way' for them. The moment of Pentecost in Jerusalem had been prepared for by the moment of the Annunciation in Nazareth, as well as by the Cross. In the Upper Room Mary's journey meets the Church's journey of faith. In what way?

Among those who devoted themselves to prayer in the Upper Room, preparing to go 'into the whole world' after receiving the Spirit, some had been called by Jesus gradually from the beginning of his mission in Israel. Eleven of them had been made Apostles, and to them Jesus had passed on the mission which he himself had received from the Father. [...]

Mary did not directly receive this apostolic mission. She was not among those whom Jesus sent "to the whole world to teach all nations" (cf. Mt. 28:19) when he conferred this mission on them. But she was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them.

In their midst Mary was 'devoted to prayer' as the



Above: The Third Glorious Mystery of the Holy Rosary, West Window of Our Lady of Ransom, detail. Photo: Rev T Cranfield

'mother of Jesus' (cf. Acts 1:13-14), of the Crucified and Risen Christ. And that first group of those who in faith looked 'upon Jesus as the author of salvation', knew that Jesus was the Son of Mary, and that she was his Mother, and that as such she was from the moment of his conception and birth a unique witness to the mystery of Jesus, that mystery which before their eyes had been disclosed and confirmed in the Cross and Resurrection. Thus, from the very first moment, the Church 'looked at' Mary through Jesus, just as she 'looked at' Jesus through Mary. For the Church of that time and of every time Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus' infancy and hidden life at Nazareth, when she 'kept all these

things, pondering them in her heart' (Lk. 2:19; cf. Lk. 2:51). [...]

Now, at the first dawn of the Church, at the beginning of the long journey through faith which began at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Mary was with all those who were the seed of the 'new Israel'. She was present among them as an exceptional witness to the mystery of Christ. And the Church was assiduous in prayer together with her, and at the same time 'contemplated her in the light of the Word made man'. It was always to be so. [...] It is precisely Mary's faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal Covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ; this heroic faith of hers 'precedes' the apostolic witness of the Church, and ever remains in the Church's heart hidden like a special heritage of God's revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the Church share in that mysterious inheritance, and in a sense share in Mary's faith."