

Pentecost 2018

A few weeks ago Pope Francis issued a document on the call to holiness entitled 'Gaudete et exsultate' – rejoice and be glad. Union with God brings us an effervescent, bubbling joy that cannot be contained. Jesus himself speaks of it as like new wine – still fermenting and fizzing - something that will split and burst a dry wine skin or, for that matter, a glass bottle. If you go to Germany in September you will find it on sale in special bottles with perforated tops! This is how the disciples gathered expectantly in Jerusalem experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost! It was like a roaring wind that shook the house – flames of fire alighting on the heads of each one yet without burning them. Filled with enthusiasm they went out into the streets telling people in their own languages of all that God had done. They could not keep quiet about it. They experienced it both as individuals and as a community.

Pope Francis comments, "In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in the human community." We are all called to be holy but each in our own way, by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. He writes, "Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain."

Our holiness grows through small gestures – daily acts of kindness or forgiveness. These are fruits of the Holy Spirit given to us by the grace of baptism and renewed and strengthened through confirmation. Holiness is love lived to the full – to the extent that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us and model our lives on that of Jesus. We need to be willing to listen to God in prayer so that others see the face of Christ in us. Pope Francis takes the image from the Book of Revelation of Christ, the Light of the World, knocking on the door of our hearts waiting for us to invite him in, and turns it around. Christ is already in our hearts. He is knocking on the door asking us to let him out! He is not a personal treasure to be locked away but comes into us so that through us he may transform the world! This is why he is like the new wine. If we truly understand what his coming to us means we cannot be silent about him, whether we bear witness in words or by the way we live.

This Pope Francis's prayer for us but especially for those who are being confirmed today is, "May you come to realise what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens."

"Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God's greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us."