

## Homily for Pentecost 2018

One must mention the Royal Wedding I suppose. In all the lead up I did not notice mention of religion. No talk of a faith position on the part of the couple. Just the religious venue of St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle where Prince Harry was baptised. British Royal weddings always have been a model of romantic weddings. These days more and more it is the venue that is the thing. Most of our Churches cannot match the beauty of nature let alone a Royal Chapel.

Choice of venue is often determined by the beauty and facilities provided rather than because of an attachment to a Church community as such. The choice of a Catholic wedding with a priest or deacon as witness at such weddings does indicate a faith connection which is not to be denied. After all it is the couple's marriage. But how many would see their sacrament as a deepening of their intimacy with the Body of Christ? Perhaps they will discover that later.

In the ten years to this year the total number of Catholic Marriages in the Archdiocese of Brisbane declined from 1379 in 2008 to 528 last year. This includes Catholic marriages celebrated in venues other than a church of which most are these days. There are surely many reasons for this decline. But one is that there are couples who were perhaps baptised as children but in later years decided they had no allegiance to the Church or they have lost faith altogether. In that case to choose not to be married in the Church is perhaps the honest thing to do. For many marriage in the church has been only a cultural expectation of family and tradition. I would hope that if there is an honest basis to a relationship then the ground may be more fertile for growth in faith as time goes by.

The same goes for all the Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. What has been the norm is now just one choice among many for families. And unless there is a desire to share faith within the faith community then there may be reason for an honest reappraisal of the choice to receive the Sacraments. This talk of decline seems to be a far cry from the energy and enthusiasm of the infant Church at Pentecost we celebrate today. Maybe, what we see as a decline might just be the birth pangs of a new beginning, a new Pentecost. One can hope.

Before it became a Christian feast, Pentecost had been a Jewish feast. We now call it the birth of the church. *Pentecostes* (Greek for "fiftieth") is the Greek name for the Jewish feast of Weeks— so-called because it occurs seven weeks, or on the fiftieth day, after Passover. These were two of the classic pilgrim feasts of the Israelite religion. Eventually each of these agricultural feasts became a commemoration of a specific event of Israel's sacred history. Unleavened Bread, joined early with Passover, became the time to recall the redemption from Egypt. Once the Passover was linked to the Exodus Pentecost came to be associated with the event in the third month after their departure from Egypt, that is, the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and the Covenant in which God brings to birth out of the Hebrews a new people, God's own people.

For us Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. We should remember the pain of giving birth. For the Apostles together with Mary, the pain of recent events was still vivid as they gathered for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. As we celebrate the new birth of those who were recently baptised at Easter 50 days ago and as we look forward to welcoming the children to their First Eucharist in a couple of weeks we also are witnessing a new birth of the Church in them. And it has not been without pain. Because to choose to love is also to expect suffering as we let go of the past.

On that first Christian Pentecost the penny finally dropped for the disciples who gathered together. With what seemed to them to be like a violent wind and what seemed to be like tongues of fire coming upon them their eyes were finally opened to the truth about the risen Lord whom they had met. The Gospel was not just about new ideas. After all Jesus said he came to fulfil the Law of Moses. The Covenant with Moses on Sinai still stands. But the Gospel was even more about having new eyes to see, new ears to hear, new hands to touch. But people often prefer to remain in the dark.

There are so many dreadful problems facing the world as we know. The message of Pentecost invites us to take courage and live in this world alive with the fire of God's love which has been poured into our hearts. It is knowing this intimate presence of God's Spirit within us that is the source of all our joy.

Fr Graham