

24 May 2015

Last Tuesday I was giving my normal lecture for the students in the unit 'The Church in Australia'. The topic I covered was the issue of post-war migration. With the bombing of Darwin during the Second World War, Australia felt particularly vulnerable as a large continent with a small population. With this and the challenge of post-war reconstruction, the cry went out to 'populate or perish'. And so began the scheme to bring to Australia predominantly people of British extraction. When it was realised that this scheme would fall far below expectation, it was decided to allow in waves of southern Europeans, especially Italians, Greeks, Maltese, Polish, Dutch, people from the Baltic countries and the former republic of Yugoslavia. The next wave was from Lebanon, Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries and then Asia in the 70s and Africa in more recent times. Political pragmatism enabled Australia to become the rich and diverse multicultural nation it is today. And we are the richer for it.

I mention this because the early Church at Pentecost was a real melting pot of unity coming about in diversity. Today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is not just a geography lesson, but a reminder of how the power of the Spirit brings about unity, harmony and understanding. In the city of Jerusalem, there were people from every nation under heaven and yet they seemed to understand each other speak in their native tongues – Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene. Yes, this is more than just a lesson in geography; it is a reminder that God's Spirit is powerful enough to smash through the boundaries of race, colour, language and culture and bring about the gift and grace of unity as the one family of God. This is the God who continues to bring about unity and harmony in creation just as he did in the book of Genesis through the gift of the Spirit that creates and renews, through the gift of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

Today on the feast of Pentecost, we are all drawn into this wonderful shaping of the Church, this bringing into unity, this new creation. The feast of Pentecost completes the Easter season of new life and grace. And so, filled with the Spirit, the disciples of Jesus are sent out as

witnesses and servants, energetic missionaries called to fill all creation with joy and Good News. We are those same disciples. Through the gift of faith and the sacraments, we are made one and sent forth. Through the word of God proclaimed here and in the unity we share as a diverse parish community, we too are made one and sent forth. And we are filled with the gifts of the Spirit which St Paul speaks about in today's second reading – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, trustfulness, goodness and self-control. The Spirit is our life.

It is in the Creed that we profess, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.' The Spirit is given to us precisely so that we are sent forth as witnesses of life, continuing to carry within us the Good News of the resurrection. We taste and feel this sense of life in the gathering of this parish community; we encounter it in the gift of God's word and in the celebration of the Eucharist where the risen Lord feeds us in love and nourishes our joy. 'Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth'.