

LOOKING AHEAD TO PENTECOST 2020

By Charles Whitehead



At this time of year, moving through the weeks of the Easter Season, I always begin to look forward to the celebration of **PENTECOST** - this year at the end of May. Pentecost is a very special time when we celebrate the life-transforming outpouring of the Holy Spirit, released by Jesus when he ascended back to his Father in heaven, just as he had promised his disciples:-

"It is" he said "what you have heard me speak about. John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" Acts 1:4-5.

In **Acts chapter 2** we read of the clear signs which accompanied the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples - noise, wind, fire - they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and immediately transformed into powerful and articulate witnesses for Jesus and the truth of the Gospel message.

For all of us too, and particularly for those involved in the **Catholic Charismatic Renewal**, Pentecost is a very special time as we remember our personal experiences of the presence and power of the Spirit, often through what is known as **baptism in the Spirit**. Of course we all receive the Spirit at our water baptism, but his possibilities to influence us powerfully and effectively are dependent on our individual willingness to respond and to allow him to work freely in us and through us. When we deliberately give him this freedom, our lives will be totally changed, just as those of the first disciples were.

At Pentecost last year, 2019, Sue and I were in Rome, invited to be part of a special meeting with **Pope Francis**, when he formally completed the setting up of **CHARIS** as an official part of the **Institution of the Church** with a public juridical personality, and part of the **Pontifical Council for Laity, Family and Life** under Cardinal Farrell. This was a very significant moment for the worldwide Charismatic Renewal, fifty two years after it began in 1967 at a retreat weekend for a small group of college students from the **University of Duquesne** in America. No-one then could have imagined that what they experienced on the Saturday evening of their retreat would have happened in every country in the world numbering more than 130 million committed Catholics, and would become a fully officially recognised part of the structure of the Church, at the wish of a Pope who would describe himself as baptised in the Holy Spirit and a committed member and supporter of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The official objectives of CHARIS are quite remarkable, beginning with the statements that CHARIS exists:-

"to help deepen and promote the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit throughout the Church, and to promote the exercise of charisms not only in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal but also in the whole Church".

CHARIS exists to serve, advise and promote the whole worldwide Catholic Charismatic Renewal - it is not an organisation with the authority to dictate what groups should say or do. No, its purpose is to offer central support, encouragement, assistance and guidance on behalf of the Church when asked to do so. The structure is simple - an **International Council** presided over by a **Moderator** with an office in Vatican premises in Rome and a small staff, with **Continental and National Councils of Communion**. Whilst the members of these bodies have initially been appointed by the Council for Laity, as soon as things become established and fully operational they will be elected.

This amazing decision made by Pope Francis himself and giving full Church recognition to the Charismatic Renewal, means that if people take a negative approach, criticising or rejecting it, they will be opposing an official Church organisation. In many ways this is the fruit of what a number of us have been working towards over the years. It is certainly a sign of God's blessing and the Holy Spirit at work - the full and official Church recognition of this amazing "**current of grace**" as vital for the life and health of the whole Church as we move forward together in response to the universal call for a **New Evangelisation** in the power of the Spirit.

Just at present most of us have more time for prayerful thought than we are used to, so as we begin to slowly emerge from our self-isolation, let's think about how we are now going to *BE* church differently as we move ahead, challenged by all that we have experienced in recent weeks and aware that with all the modern technology and new ways to communicate that we have learned to use, we now need to be very open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we move forward together in new ways as the Church.

*Reflections by Charles Whitehead,
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