

**HOMILY FOR JOINT ECUMENICAL SERVICE HELD IN ST PHILOMENA'S,
WINCHBURGH**

THURSDAY 1 JUNE 2017

'PENTECOST'

This means the '50th' day after the Passover and it is one of the most important feasts in the Jewish calendar. Because of this significance, numerous Jews living in foreign countries had, at that time, gathered in Jerusalem as pilgrims. Just as perhaps you do at the General Assembly and we do at an Archdiocesan Assembly in Edinburgh.

It was on that very Pentecost Day, 50 days after Jesus celebrated the Passover, that God sends the Holy Spirit (3rd Person of the Trinity), upon the earth and the Church is born. It is very important that we see this as God's initiative, not ours, and that it was prophesied by John the Baptist, in Luke 3:16, "I baptise you with water but the one who is coming after me will do much more. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire".

The rushing wind is a distinctive sign because "spirit" means both "breath" and "wind" in Hebrew culture/language. The fruits of that "breath" are seen in Peter, who now speaks up. He knows the truth and believes, therefore, he boldly proclaims it, as Jesus prophesied in John 15:26, "From the Father, I will send you the Spirit of Truth, who comes from the Father. When this helper comes, He will testify about me",

We see that very quickly in Acts 2:14-39, where Peter is empowered by the Holy Spirit, his words are so Spirit led, that some 3,000 people were baptized that day!!

This reminds me of Yeavinger Bell, in the 9th Century, in Northumbria. What happened at Pentecost was as unique as what took place at the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit empowers the Church of every generation, to bring about repentance, conversion and healing to the spiritual grace of humanity. The true faith in Christ brings about apostolic renewal, religious awakening and dynamic communities that become the new blood of the Church. A Church that is both ageing and simultaneously being renewed.

That is perhaps poignantly brought real for us in Winchburgh, where, with the coming of new people and families to the 'Village', we are more aware of the community of old and at the same time, the potential renewal that occurs with the 'new blood' into our Church communities, which hopefully rekindles the 'fire of the Holy Spirit' in those who have been here, in the Mission of the Church, all their days.

Many strange accents will, and do, come amongst us, as well as foreign tongues. On the face of it, a recipe for chaos, like the Tower of Babel, but when the Holy Spirit is at the centre of the encounter, there is truly a common language of faith. One faith, giving praise to God, in many languages, ie Polish, Hindi, Tamil, Spanish, German, Geordie and even perhaps, the Falkirk 'dialect'. The true missionary is unperturbed by foreign language, by the Holy Spirit, he/she becomes an instrument of faith, that crosses all boundaries of language, culture, race and tradition.

It is that selfsame Holy Spirit that rescues us, as Psalm 71 indicates, from wickedness and oppression. That the dark dominions of secularism and materialism will not hold out against the will and truth of God. That, today, we are increasingly aware that the greatest threat to Christianity, is the secular/humanist/atheistic movements that seek to deny the very existence of the Trinitarian God. Let us stand together in faith, unity and Pentecostal Spirit, to fulfil God's work on earth.

God Bless you all.