

Homily Pentecost Sunday 2026

“The oldest trick in the book”

I remember being reprimanded by my Mum, God rest her soul, when I was about 10 years of age for answering her back. ‘You my boy are getting too big for your boots, show a little respect and humility.’ I got the message! Nowadays, individuals and society are arguably getting ‘too big for their boots’. For example, Richard Dawkins accuses anyone who believes in God ‘delusional’; Parliament, by law, allows the aborting of unborn children; more recently, in line with countries like Canada and Switzerland, we have been debating an ‘assisted dying’ bill. We appear to be in an increasingly ‘anything goes’ world where individual rights seem paramount with scant regard for individual and community responsibility or indeed God’s law. Secularism, individualism, materialism and consumerism have become many people’s gods, modern day builders of The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). We think by building great temples to ‘Mammon’, falling to the oldest trick in the book, we will become like God.

Today, Pentecost Sunday, we RELIVE the Coming of The Holy Spirit. We are truly present in the Upper Room when The Holy Spirit descends on us showering with gifts. One such gift is “holy fear of God”, reverence toward God and humility before him. Having ‘holy fear of God’ means ‘knowing our place’, mere creatures ‘created in God’s image and likeness’ (Genesis 1). ‘Holy fear of God’ means not ‘getting too big for our boots.’ and not making Eve and Adam’s mistake, falling for the oldest trick in the book, thinking by ‘eating this fruit and you will be like God.’ (Genesis 3:2-22)

Dawkins, secularist governments and peddlers of the ‘God is dead’ philosophy (Nietzsche) argue that there is no evidence that God exists. They argue that reason and empirical science have all the answers. Of course they don’t. Scientists often disprove their previous conclusions (Popper) or backtrack on their so-called watertight scientific theories. When I see a woman emerge from The Sacrament of Reconciliation in tears of joy after 25 years of absence from The Sacraments; when I witness the healing of a man who has been diagnosed over 40 years ago as ‘clinically deaf’ and see proof from an audiologist that the improvement cannot be medically explained; when I hear of a child diagnosed with incurable leukaemia being given the ‘all clear’ following group prayer; when I personally witness the unexplained and sudden radical U turn in a person’s life after bathing in the waters of Lourdes; when I witness a long term alcoholic suddenly and dramatically, after months of intercessory prayer, permanently cured of his addiction, I have more than enough evidence that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exist and continue to act in our world.

The disciples were transformed in both accounts of Pentecost in today’s Liturgy of The Word. In our First Reading, from Acts, their fear dissipates and they face the world with courage and fortitude, proclaiming The Resurrection of Jesus openly with wisdom and understanding beyond their life experience. In The Gospel of St John the disciples, on the evening of the day of The Resurrection, reverently and humbly (‘holy fear of God’) acknowledge the greatness of God, receive The Holy Spirit and then courageously ‘go out’ to forgive sins in Jesus’ name.

We, Jesus’ disciples today are signs of God’s presence in the world. However, as Fr Antony Gatt said recently in a homily, ‘My sister bought an exercise bike and thought by simply buying it she would lose weight!’ No, we will only be evidence of God’s presence if, like The Early Church, we turn the world upside down and consistently put into practice The Holy Spirit’s gifts. We are called to bring love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness to the neediest and remove heavy burdens from their shoulders.

Clergy and laity together are urged to embrace, with profound humility, The Father’s desire to heal and comfort the most vulnerable. We are called to obey Christ’s words not man-made rules, ‘Come to me all you who are laden and overburdened for I am gentle and humble of heart, and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light’. We must ask ourselves are the needy raised up, liberated and gladdened by our ministry or are they crushed by our harsh judgements as we act as self-made gods, ‘the devil’s oldest trick in the book’

Oh, what a ‘New Pentecost’ (Suenens) God in The Holy Spirit would enkindle in The Church if we would really take Jesus’ words to heart and put them into practice. What evidence that God is alive in our world today would be evident to all and how stunningly beautiful our Church would be!