*Parish of the Sacred Heart, Skegness, and Our Lady and the English Martyrs, Spilsby.*

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Pentecost Sunday, 5th June, 2022.

"Send forth Your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth." (Ps. 103:30)

Dear friends,

 Let me wish you and your families every blessing and happiness on this feast of the birthday of the Church at Pentecost. We ask our heavenly Father, together with our Risen Lord, now ascended into heaven and seated at the Father's right hand, to send forth upon us once more the Holy Spirit of truth, of love and of eternal life, to renew us individually, our families, our world and our Church.

It is now ten months since I became your parish priest. We are all still living with the effects of the pandemic and, in families and communities alike, severe economic pressures assail us, while our world is stricken by war or the threat of war in the Ukraine and elsewhere. Our Church faces difficulties from the decline in the birth-rate, from lack of faith and hence from falling numbers of priests. We must not let ourselves be discouraged. The early Church had yet fewer numbers, faced persecution and the unknown problems in lands which needed to hear the Gospel of Christ and to know and embrace in faith the power of His resurrection.

It is understandable that the confidence of people has been shaken, that the practice of the faith, especially at Mass on Sundays or Saturday evenings, has been weakened, given the grave threat to health and to life from what was an unknown virus. I wish to thank all who have tried to keep our parish going over these last two and a half years, in various ways. I thank all of you who have been able to return to the church and all who, unable to do so through illness or through grave risk to health, have sought to maintain a true spiritual communion with the Lord and with His Church through the television, by other technical means, through your constant prayer. Of course, the problems go back before the pandemic. Many people have drifted away over the years for all sorts of reasons, out of annoyance, through giving way to other worries and pressures in the family, at work, in society, through laziness which has then developed into a bad habit.

Let me invite all of you to begin anew this Pentecost; with me and with all in the Church. This can be a new beginning, when we open ourselves up once more to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to allow the Spirit to renew us, to reinvigorate the Church, to renew the face of the earth. We are all well aware of the problems and of the difficulties we face in the world and in the Church. Yet, the disciples of old and in all ages faced similar or other problems. However, they neither gave up nor gave way to pressure; they persevered, convinced in faith that Christ our Lord had truly risen from the dead ("The Lord has truly risen, Alleluia!" - *Victimae paschali laudes*, 'Praise to the Paschal Victim' - Sequence of Easter), truly the conqueror of sin, of suffering and of death itself and of its power (Rom. 5:15-21), the one and only lasting hope for all people (1 Pet. 1:3-4). They were convinced too that the Holy Spirit lives in the Church (Rom. 8:9-11; Col. 3:3-4), in Whom Christ unites us to Himself through the sacraments, especially through holy communion, and in Himself to the Father and indeed to one another in the communion of the Church. The disciples of old across the centuries lived this faith in their ordinary lives, dedicated themselves to the mission of the Church through marriage and the family, at work, in caring for the sick, the poor, and in spreading the Gospel in the various circumstances of their lives.

This is neither something magical nor some merely human enthusiasm that does not last. This concerns the life of the Church itself, its faith, its prayer, not only individually at home, but as the community built up through the Eucharist by the Lord and in the Spirit. Our Lord does not ask us to be powerful, influential, extraordinary, but to be faithful, persevering, persons hoping in Him and in the Spirit no matter what, praying together at Mass and in all the sacraments, working together, perhaps in some Church activities, but above all at home, at school, at work, in retirement or when ill; great saints have done this always in the life of the Church.

It was always the case that those who missed Mass through no fault of their own committed no sin, since the duty is to come to Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation unless it is physically or morally impossible to do so - when too ill themselves, prevented by serious factors beyond their control, having to look after someone too ill to be left alone even for an hour or so or, as in the earlier stages of the pandemic when there was serious risk of contagion with a (then largely) deadly virus.

I repeat my thanks to all who have made such efforts to come, to keep things going, to look after those unable to be with us. To everyone, I renew the pressing invitation of Our Lord to each and every one of us to 'Come, follow me' and to fulfil in our daily lives the commitment of faith in baptism and in confirmation to spread the Gospel in and through our daily activities. That can be done even by the sick, through their prayers, their patience, their example. I invite those who have been away from church during the pandemic or perhaps for longer, even much longer, to take up the practise of their faith once more and so to give witness to one another and to others of the hope we have in Christ, our Lord. If you are too ill to come to church, please let me know, also in order to be able to receive the sacraments. If there is some other reason, even difficult, why you may not have been coming, let us talk it over, to sort out a way forward.

As a parish, we are hoping to renew our discipleship of the Lord especially over the next three years. In 2025, on 3rd May, it will be the centenary of the dedication of the church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Spilsby (the feast of the English Martyrs being on 4th May). The new church of the Sacred Heart was opened in 1950, but seems never to have been formally consecrated. I have asked to the Bishop to come to consecrate our church on the feast of the Sacred Heart in 2025. These two events will give us a focus as a parish, also for a programme of spiritual renewal and preparation over the next three years.

If at all possible, try to come to the feast of the Sacred Heart this year on 24th June next, to celebrate with us at Mass at 12.00 noon and to join us for refreshments in the Hall afterwards. Those of you whom I do not yet know, please get in touch and I shall try to meet you. Please, contact me by 'phone, letter or e-mail or through other parishioners.

"May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us bring it to completion." (cf. Phil 1:6)

I wish you all a very blessed and happy feast of Pentecost. Let us go forward together, that, through us, the Holy Spirit may renew the face of the world.

(Fr.) G.J. Woodall.

(Parish Priest)