



**COME
HOLY SPIRIT!
LEAD US BACK TO MASS FOR
THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY!**

NINTH PASTORAL LETTER

from Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP

to the Clergy and Faithful of Sydney during the COVID-19

Pandemic and in the lead up to Pentecost Sunday, 23 May 2021



*Dear brothers
and sisters in Christ,*

READY!

*What did the faithful do before
the first Pentecost?*

The *Acts of the Apostles* reports that, returning to Jerusalem after the Lord's Ascension, the apostles "devoted themselves constantly to prayer and supplication, together with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brethren" (*Acts* 1:12-14). Then they decided Matthias would fill the vacancy left by Judas.

To be ready for Pentecost ourselves, we 'the women' and 'the brethren' must open wide the doors to the chapel of our souls, inviting the Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in us.

It's not just a one-to-One invitation. *Ecclesia* – church – does not mean a building so much as an assembly. We gather, as the first disciples gathered, in the days before Pentecost. If we are to be receptive to the Spirit when He comes, we'd best do this together, with the Church.

What the faithful did before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was **gather, pray, discern.**

SET!

*What did the faithful do during
the first Pentecost?*

Again they congregated. "When Pentecost day came, they were all together in one place," we are told (*Acts* 2:1).

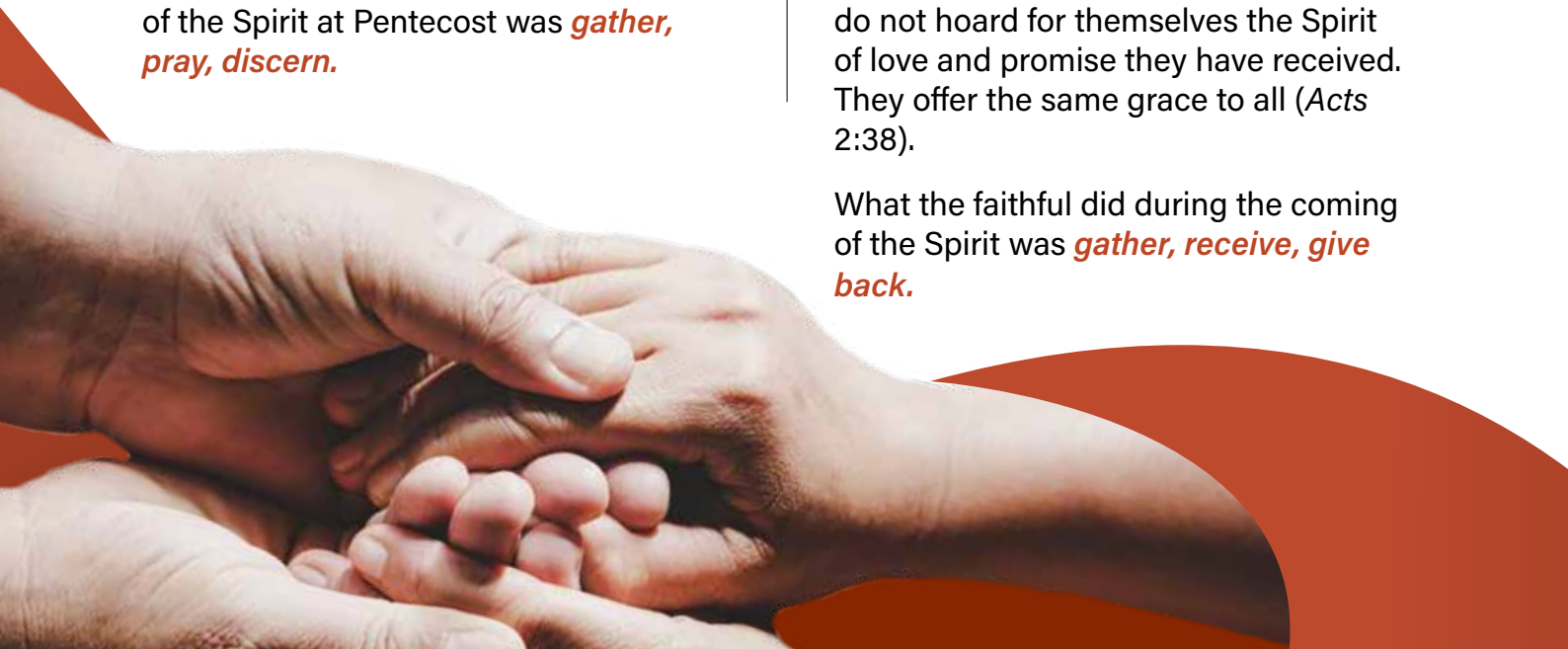
In the Old Testament story of Babel (*Gen.* 11:1-9), the human race decides to build a tower up to heaven to make themselves gods. God responds to this vanity project by confounding their speech, so humanity is divided into rival tribes, each with its own language, none understanding the other.

The New Testament story of Pentecost (*Acts* 2:1-41) is a counter-narrative to this. Devout people of every nation gather for Shavuot, the spring festival of the Jews¹, not to make themselves gods but to be made God's children. God responds to this humility project by giving them a shared spiritual language, so they understand each other as never before.

After fifty days in hiding, Peter and the others break out in words of proclamation and invitation. Instead of condemning the world that has just crucified its Creator, they absolve the world that has just been given back its Redeemer.

They offer baptism to the repentant. They do not hoard for themselves the Spirit of love and promise they have received. They offer the same grace to all (*Acts* 2:38).

What the faithful did during the coming of the Spirit was **gather, receive, give back.**



GO!

What did the faithful do after the first Pentecost?

The Holy Spirit is a force to be reckoned with. He inspires, impassions, impels. The first disciples were driven out of their safe space to take on the very powers that had killed their Lord and friend only fifty days before.

Like the wildfire that had descended upon their heads, they spread the Gospel far and wide. They preached and welcomed people in their thousands. But how did they live? "They devoted themselves to the doctrine of the Apostles, to the common life, to the Breaking of the Bread, and to the prayers," *Acts* continues, "worshipping together daily at the Temple . . . praising God and enjoying the good will of the people" (*Acts* 2:42-7).

What's more, they stuck together, "holding their possessions in common, selling and giving to the poor . . . sharing their meals with glad and generous hearts" (*Acts* 2:44-6). Even after being sent out to all the world, these Spirit-filled disciples lived and partied and served *together*.

They were the '**Go Make Disciples**' generation. They were us.

What the faithful did after the coming of the Spirit was **gather, proclaim, give witness**.

READY, SET, GO IN A WORLD AFFECTED BY COVID

In the Year of COVID half the Australian population thought more about their mortality and the meaning of life. 41% were thinking more about God. 35% prayed more.²

After a year of sickness, separation, anxiety and lock-downs, we are free once more to gather for Mass at Pentecost, on the Church's birthday.

After a year of enforced 'retreat,' the Spirit is calling us back to the Eucharistic Breaking of the Bread and to the Eucharistic life of service.

By healing every wounded heart and lifting up every downcast soul, the Spirit of God renews the face of the earth. Now it's our turn.

Here are a few suggestions of how:

- Pray for those who have not yet returned to Mass, and for boldness in our own witness to Christ present in the Eucharist.



The Predication of Saint Peter, c. 1642
Charles Poësson,

- Wear something red for the day (or week) of Pentecost, as a sign of the fire of faith we all share: it could be a great conversation starter!
- Bring along with you to Mass at Pentecost (or in the weeks that follow) someone who otherwise might not attend.
- Send out invitations to Pentecost Mass (and Mass generally) via letterbox drops, email campaigns, notes to school parents, SRE catechists, community notice boards, local papers.
- Make Pentecost (or a Sunday soon after) a Parish Open Day, with hospitality, information packs, tours, an introduction to an upcoming parish programme or formation opportunity.
- Have a look at all the great ideas in our Archdiocesan Mission Plan *Go Make Disciples* (www.gomakedisciples.org.au) and pick one or two your parish could activate right now.



WE ARE A PENTECOST PEOPLE

Pentecost makes us *ready*, as we gather, pray, discern. Pentecost makes us *set*, as we gather, receive, give back. Pentecost makes us *go*, as we gather, proclaim, give witness.

Pentecost is the great coming together. Gone is the incomprehension and rivalry of Babel. Humanity is set on a new course by the Spirit of Love.

As we hear in John's Gospel, when the Risen Christ returned to His disciples, He breathed the Holy Spirit upon them (*Jn 20:22*). Only by that Spirit's wisdom would the Liar be vanquished and people be consecrated in the truth (*Jn 16:13; 17:17*). Only by that Spirit's power would sins be forgiven, and people be reconciled (*Jn 20:23; Mt 16:19; 18:18*). Only by that Spirit's breath would diverse people be united as one body in Christ (*2Cor 12:3-13*). Only then would the Church be born.

We pray that same Spirit will bring our Church to birth once more.

Come Holy Spirit! Lead us back to Mass for the Church's birthday!

Yours in the Spirit of Truth and Love,

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP
Archbishop of Sydney



CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE
OF SYDNEY

1. cf. *Ex 23:16; 34:22; Dt 16:9; Lev 23:16; Num 28:26*.
2. Anna Patty, "The meaning of life: Australians praying more during COVID-19," *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 August 2020; McCrindle Research, *The Future of the Church in Australia* (Sydney: McCrindle Research, 2020), pp. 15f.