

PENTECOST SUNDAY, MAY 31 2020

## 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF DIOCESE OF PALMERSTON NORTH

Pentecost gives us an opportunity to reflect on our identity: our identity as Church because the Church originated in that first Pentecost; and our identity as the Diocese of Palmerston North because the consecration of our diocese to the Holy Spirit made Pentecost our patronal feast, and today is its fortieth.

When our diocese began, we adopted as our “mission statement” the Acts of the Apostles. There we find a live picture of what it means to be the community of Jesus’ disciples. We look back there, not to replicate the past – that would be mere antiquarianism, but to re-discover the aliveness, the enthusiasm, excitement, daring and joy that characterizes Christian community.

On our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I remember saying here in the cathedral: “if it’s in the Acts of the Apostles you can do it!” which was a way of saying the same Holy Spirit who guided those first disciples in their circumstances guides us in ours! So, let’s get on with it! And, just in case I am not here for our 50<sup>th</sup>, let me say it again, but in the words of the Maori proverb: ka titiro whakamuri kia anga whakamua, which means “let us move into the future with our eyes on where we are coming from”. In this way we strengthen our continuity with those first Christian communities.

That first Pentecost, pictured for us in the Acts of the Apostles, was all about the sending of the Holy Spirit; the community we call the “Church” came out of that sending. That’s why we short-change ourselves when only say “the Church has a mission”. First there was a mission, and it had a church – i.e. a community whose whole purpose was to witness to, and make present, that mission. The mission of the Holy Spirit, continuing in the life of the Church, is to draw all creation into the life of the Risen Christ. Everything the Church is and has and does is for that purpose.

That’s why Pope Francis calls us to courageously re-shape the life and structures of the Church as best suits that original purpose, that mission. In this way, it is Pope Francis who is being faithful to the Church’s origins, (not those who don’t want to make those changes), and faithful to the Church’s tradition (not his critics.)

Then, echoing The Council itself, he calls on the Church “to grow young”! - not become prematurely old. To illustrate his point, he talks about how young people make the Church young, and then reminds the rest of us we are called to be young in heart. In his own words:

Much of the longing present in the hearts of young people can be summed up in the word “restlessness”... Restless discontent, combined with exhilaration before the opening up of new horizons, generates a boldness that leads you to stand up and take responsibility for a mission. This healthy restlessness, typical of youth, continues to dwell in every heart that remains young, open and generous...

Dear young people, make the most of these years of your youth. Don’t observe from a balcony. Don’t confuse happiness with an armchair, or live your life behind a screen. Whatever you do, do not become the sorry sight of an abandoned vehicle! Don’t be parked cars, but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Don’t go through life anaesthetized, or approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus! Cast out the fears that paralyse you, so that you don’t become young mummies.

Give yourselves over to the best of life. Open the door of the cage, go out and fly! Please don't take early retirement.

Adults, too, have to mature without losing the values of youth. Every age of life is a permanent grace, with its own enduring value. The experience of a youth well lived always remains in our heart. It continues to grow and bear fruit throughout adulthood. Young people are naturally attracted by an infinite horizon opening up before them. Adult life, with its securities and comforts can risk shrinking that horizon and losing that youthful excitement. The very opposite should happen: as we mature, grow older and structure our lives, we should never lose that enthusiasm and openness to an ever greater reality. At every moment in life, we can renew our youthfulness. When I began my ministry as Pope, the Lord broadened my horizons and granted me renewed youth. The same thing can happen to (every one of us)... (Christus Vivit 138, 143, 160)

If *we* are like that, and we are the Church, then *the Church* is like that – in us it grows young. That's why we need to move into the future with our eyes on where we are coming from – looking back to the Acts of the Apostles to see what the Christian community is meant to be like.