

Homily Pentecost 4/6/17

While I was away and was following the news and the election campaign, a book I read long ago came to mind, it's called 'Holiness and Politics.' Holiness and politics – not two subjects you would naturally put together are they? The theme of the book is that to be involved in politics in a just and equitable way is a means to holiness. Political action, often means coming together with others to further common interests. That idea fits in very well with the theme of this Sunday's readings – 'When Pentecost Day came round the Apostles were all met together in one room.....' There was a meeting – a 'presence' to others, and that makes the Spirit possible. When we are 'present' to ourselves and others, we open ourselves up to being influenced by the Spirit of God.

One of the things I've found highly disturbing, in the election campaign, and in politics generally, is the incredible amount of personal abuse that is casually thrown about. However, during one of the televised political debates I saw to my great surprise, a wonderful exception to this general rule. One of the candidates was being attacked by another for his perceived lack of patriotism, and alleged support for terrorists. Angus Robertson of the SNP came to the defence of the vilified candidate, who was not from his party and said, 'That's very unjust and unfair of you to raise that issue in such a mischievous way. Every person I know who is standing in this election is a patriot and wants the best for the country as they see it – even if you personally disagree with them.' And that's the first time I've ever heard a politician speak with such respect for an opposing politician, and come to his defence. There was for a time a meeting in one room..... an openness to another person that you don't normally agree with.....

I was reminded for a moment of most of the great saints. They were involved in, and knew of their societies' problems. They had a great

sense of 'Presence' and they were certainly not weak in tackling those problems. So holiness is not about being weak in defending ones views and attitudes to life – it's about being strong – standing up and being counted! You've only to think of St Francis of Assisi, with his great practical love for the poor. He gave up everything, and lived a life of poverty – profound poverty for the medieval period – so that he could ally himself with God's little ones. Think also of Saint Catherine of Siena, who in the middle ages and as a most courageous woman sought to tackle the political and religious problems of her day, AND had a profound influence on the outcomes of events. She was 'Present' to the problems and issues of her day. Or again, think of Saint Vincent de Paul who organised others to tackle the immense poverty around him in the Paris of his day. Another 'holy' man John Newton in the 18th Century, went aboard slave ships to minister to the unfortunate inmates and tried to relieve their burdens. He it was who wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace was blind, but now I see!' Again think of the founders of the charitable women's Religious Orders.

So I would say that sanctity, holiness is a meeting in that same Upper Room. All those great saints met spiritually in that Upper Room – the Upper Room - the Pentecost of engagement and encounter with the Spirit, and with and for, others. While I was reflecting on the spirit of Pentecost, it came to me – are we REALLY open to the Spirit? Are we REALLY under the influence of the Holy Spirit? Albert Einstein, that great scientist and rationalist wrote something very profound and thought provoking. We would do well to listen to what he wrote. 'The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious – it is the source of all true art and true science. Those to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder, or stand rapt in awe, are as good as dead. Their eyes are closed.' Isn't that incredible from a scientist? Of course Einstein had been brought up in the Jewish faith, and was therefore already a spiritual person.

And so we must ask ourselves, are OUR eyes closed, as closed as those with no faith and no sense of awe and wonder? Are WE in that same upper room as the Apostles – do we REALLY listen to the Word of God? Are we present to ourselves, and in communion with all who have gone before us in such a way as to open our hearts and minds, and REALLY let in the Spirit of Christ?!