

Dear Friends

As I write this, we are preparing for Pentecost, that great Christian Festival that is often called “the Birthday of the Church”. On this day we celebrate the moment when, as Jesus had promised before he ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon his followers. The Church began and it began, as had been promised, on the work of Peter, who preached for ten minutes and “three thousand were added to their number. How we long for such preaching today!

It is an interesting festival in that it remains uniquely by and for the Christian people. Christmas and Easter have been adopted by people of all faiths and none, Harvest is celebrated, particularly in rural places, more widely than just in the Church, but Pentecost is ours, especially since the Whit Bank Holiday was de-coupled from it in 1972 and replaced with the Spring bank holiday.

However, it shares a date with the Jewish festival “Shavuot” – the reason so many had gathered in Jerusalem. Still celebrated by the Jewish community to this day, it marks the day when the law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It can perhaps be seen by Christians as the final culmination of Jesus’ promise that he had come, not to abolish the law, but to fulfil it.

Then there is the presence of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the speaking in tongues. Pentecost is often seen as the mirror image to the Tower of Babel. However, whereas Babel saw the breaking up of a community into a number of different groupings, each speaking a different language and therefore no longer understanding each other, at Pentecost it wasn't that everyone started speaking the same language, it was that even though speaking in different languages they could understand each other. Pentecost therefore also becomes a celebration of diversity. God speaks to each and every one in language each can understand meeting them where they are. As his followers we should perhaps pay attention to that and what it means in the way in which we communicate with people who are different to us, whether because of language or something else. Pentecost therefore celebrates not just the birth of the church, not just the coming of the Holy Spirit, but also the lived experience of a God who is for all people. May we continue to follow this example.

God bless, Vicci