

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Feast of Wind and Fire

Pentecost, the feast we celebrate this Sunday, May 29, fifty days after Easter, is a dramatic feast of wind and fire.



Recently when the March winds blew so strong all one night, I thought, "This is what Pentecost must have sounded like — frightening and yet freshening." And the other night a barn fire lighted the night sky. And again I thought of Pentecost — a fire which destroyed what had been in order to make room for the new.

The Holy Spirit, according to an ancient prayer of the Church, "renews the face of the earth."

In more popular terms, Pentecost is often called "the birthday of the Church." It was on that first Pentecost that the old fears of the huddled apostles were burned away and the wind of the Spirit blew open their locked doors sending them into the streets of Jerusalem to begin their mission to make disciples of all nations.

The task they began is yet to be completed and that is one reason why beloved Pope John prayed for "a new Pentecost" in our time — to fire us with enthusiasm, to renew us in Spirit and power.

Many people are puzzled, disturbed, discouraged by the Church these days. I think all of us wish it could be much better in many ways.

One of the great men of our Church today who

shares this wish for a better Church is Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens of Belgium. He has written a book titled "A New Pentecost?" and in his preface to the book he tells why he has great hopes for our embattled Church

"The ways of Providence are by nature surprising," the Cardinal writes. "God is here, near us, unforeseeable and loving. I am a man of hope, not for human reasons nor for any natural optimism, but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church and in the world, even where his name remains unheard. I am an optimist because I believe the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of creation. To those who welcome him he gives each day fresh liberty and renewed joy and trust."

Cardinal Suenens concludes his statement, "Who would dare to say that the love and imagination of God were exhausted? To hope is a duty, not a luxury. To hope is not just to dream, but to pay the price to make these dreams come true."

Many years ago I discovered a one sentence prayer which is still appropriate today, "Lord, renew your Church beginning with me." That can be a very hazardous prayer if we really mean it and God really answers it.

And this renewal of the Church can begin also in our own parishes. Too often we wait for orders from the top when we all know that in God's world of nature, growth begins below and from within. Our Holy Father, Pope Paul, has repeatedly asked for just this kind of renewal, personal and local, so at last it can flower into a worldwide renewal of the universal

Church. We ought not to disappoint him too much longer.

May I suggest that a very simple way to renew interest and concern for your own parish Church is to find out when it started, what is your parish church's birthday, and then why not arrange a birthday party! And if there is no clear date in your parish history, then Pentecost can be as appropriate a date as any.

"Why such concern for just a parish church?" you may ask. This item in a parish bulletin may give you the answer.

Love me! Love my bricks, my timbers, for I am a holy sanctuary where anyone may commune with the Creator of the universe through music, word, or silence. Love my people! The rich, the poor, wise, ignorant, enthusiastic, despairing, dedicated, indifferent, loving, critical, but tied together by the silken web of divine love.

I am your church; Lay your fears, your joys, your sorrows at my altar. Bring your true sacrifice of talent, time, imagination and treasure that God's presence may glow in a dark world for the lost, the lonely, the spirit-ill.

I am your Church! Love me, pray for me, keep me strong to do God's work.

I hope the Pentecost will be indeed a birthday, a new beginning, a day of renewal in the Spirit for you personally, for your parish and for God's worldwide Church.

vatican news

Enduring Nature of the Paschal Mystery

During the May 11 general audience of the Holy Father delivered the following address.

Easter has passed. But we know that it is an event that remains. It remains, mind, not only in the historical memory of the event which we all remember: the death on the cross inflicted on Jesus, because, as Pilate had written on the inscription placed on the cross, He, "Jesus of Nazareth was the king of the Jews"; and the resurrection on the third day of the mysterious Crucified; but it remains also in the reality of the marvellous fact, inserted in the profession of faith, the "Creed", which the Church makes us recite in a tone of certainty in the act of baptism and then in the celebration of the Mass.

It remains in the interior life of every believer, it remains in the conviction of the followers, among whom we all have the joy and the pride of including ourselves, in the religious society derived from the Crucified and Risen Christ; it remains in the mystical and sacramental presence, which accompanies the Church in her pilgrimage in time, while waiting for Him, Christ dead and risen again, finally to awaken mankind from the sleep of death, judge it and assign it, if meritorious, a new form of life, united with Him, in ineffable fullness.

This is the faith, this is the truth. This is the vision of past history and the prophecy for future history, which has its focal centre, irradiating over the world, in Jesus' death and return to life; it is the "Weltanschauung", the perspective of the universe.

We will do well to consider our life in the light of this revelation. "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8, 12), Jesus said. And what attracts us today, as we try to form a paschal mentality, is the thought that Jesus

Himself offered to the two sad and disappointed disciples of Emmaus, as they are usually defined, the comprehensive vision of this historico-religious plan which is centred upon Him Himself. Do you remember the scene described by the evangelist St. Luke?

Let us read it together.

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.' And he said to them, 'O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.

And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?' And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24, 13-35).

You have heard. Jesus kindly accompanies the two wayfarers, who, extremely afflicted by the tragedy of Good Friday, are losing faith and hope: "We had hoped . . ." And the Lord, in the indistinct appearance of the companion who has joined them as they walk, reproves them; and he explains to them the meaning of a historical plan still obscure to them, the historical plan which rendered consistent and transparent by the Lord's interpretation of the Scriptures, is now comprehensible in its deep and bipolar significance: first, "it was necessary that Christ should suffer"; second: "to enter into his glory".

The drama of the freedoms, first of all and mysterious the freedom of God, which is Love, even in the sacrifice of Jesus then that of Christ who, though sweating blood, offers Himself and sacrifices Himself; then that of the crucifiers, the responsible executors, but defended by Jesus Himself because of their inability to understand, of the disciples and spectators, jointly responsible in a certain way, and that of the myriads of men, who, sinning, conspired in the immolation of the Lamb of God, "who takes away the sins of the world", . . . the drama of freedom, we were saying, is exalted here too, but absorbed in a superior ineffable plan of wisdom, goodness and divine will, which gives a character of salutary necessity to the cross, and therefore to the resurrection: "it was necessary that Christ should suffer" for Him "to enter into his glory"!

We must always think over this paschal mystery! It is the cornerstone of the world religious economy. Think it over and relive it.