

PENTECOST 2018

Long before becoming a Christian feast, Pentecost had been a Jewish feast. This avoids a facile understanding of the Church as some Silicon Valley type start-up company and grounds Luke's narrative of what is rightly called '*the birth of the Church*' with a genetic pedigree and heritage. *Pentecostes* is the Greek name for the Jewish feast of *Weeks*— because it occurs seven weeks, or on the fiftieth day, after the feast of *Unleavened Bread/Passover*. These were the first two of the three classic pilgrim feasts of the Israelite religion. Originally agricultural feasts, *Unleavened Bread* celebrated the beginning of the cereal harvest. *Weeks* the end of the grain harvest, and the third feast, *Booths* or *Tabernacles*, was the vintage.

Before long, historical events in the lives of the Jewish people led to the link of *Passover* with the deliverance from slavery in Egypt; *Weeks/Pentecost*, with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai; and *Booths/Tabernacles*, with abiding in God's presence. Using this sequence of feasts, the early Christians saw *Passover* as redemption by Christ, *Pentecost* as the gift of the Spirit and *Tabernacles* the abiding presence of Christ, including his coming in the flesh, his rising to new life, his sacramental interaction with us on our human life journey and his final coming in glory.

W. H. Auden wrote the poem *Whitsunday in Kirchstetten* in his Austrian summer house and the closing lines are as follows:

There is no Queen's English
in any context for *Geist* or *Esprit*: about
catastrophe or how to behave in one
what do I know, except what everyone knows
if there when Grace dances, I should dance.

The Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci suggests, it is difficult to maintain the optimism of the will in the face of the pessimism of the intellect. That is the stew that has resulted when the 1947 UN Partition Plan was ignored in favour of warfare so that the term *al-Nakba*, 'the Catastrophe' was coined to describe the unresolved plight of the 700,000 people who fled to the West Bank, but also for the 150,000 Palestinians who remained in Israel.

Tribalism is alive and well in the age of the internet, with its divisiveness based on birth place, nationality, religious belief, politics and skin colour. Pentecost is the antidote to this venom of tribalism. We heard in Acts how the house shook as the Spirit fell down on the assembled disciples, evoking the theophany on Mount Sinai. The Spirit is the legacy and heritage of every Christian believer. We are a spirit people, called into life by the spirit of the risen Lord.

The tweet of Pope Francis a few hours ago is: 'Never forget this golden rule: "*Do to others what you would have them do to you*"'

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