

God's Breath of Life

In 1961, when Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council, he prayed for “a new Pentecost” – that the Holy Spirit would breathe new life into the Church in modern times, as in the days of the apostles. “Renew your wonders in our time, as though for a new Pentecost.”

This prayer is just as appropriate today, especially in view of the problems we face in the Church and in the world.

One of the most obvious issues within the Church in various countries is the declining numbers of people attending Mass. In a recent survey of non-practising Catholics in Australia, a number of those interviewed said that they regarded the Church as irrelevant to their lives. When people stop coming to Mass and describe the Church as “irrelevant”, this can be discouraging – especially for those who do go to Mass and those who believe the Church could offer people good news that is very relevant to their lives.

The Church also faces opposition from outside. In the last few years, all religions have come under strong attacks from a new wave of anti-religious writing from authors such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. They propose that believing in God is a delusion and that religion is the root of all evils.

Problems within the Church and attacks from outside could prompt us to be down-hearted. If we are feeling this way, however, we might find some consolation in remembering that the first Christians were troubled too. After Jesus' crucifixion, they felt lost without his presence.

It is particularly when we are troubled or anxious that Pentecost is such wonderful news. It is the Feast of Divine Surprise, Life, and Delight.

The Spirit is given as Jesus had promised before his departure. The Spirit that Jesus breathed into the disciples is the same Spirit breathed into us. The presence of the Spirit in us is also the constant assurance Jesus gives to us that he will always be with us, in ways we never expected or even imagined. It is the Spirit of Life and Mission.

We are asked not to be afraid but rather to receive the Spirit of peace, joy and life with open hearts and to be led by the Spirit to new possibilities of living. We are also given a mission to share our experience so that others too may come to be touched and transformed by the Spirit.

So do not be afraid or lose heart. We do not need to be apologetic at all in what we believe and proclaim. Just stand up and be counted. The Spirit has already been breathed into us.

May each of you experience a new Pentecost in your heart.