



Diocese of Limerick Our Catholic Community

Pentecost

Letter to read out at Masses at the weekend 11/12 May, 2024

Next week is the Feast of Pentecost. Perhaps as Catholics we don't give it the importance and degree of celebration we should. In many ways, it is the culmination of a journey that began at Lent. During the forty days of Lent, we prepared to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection. Then for six weeks, we celebrate Easter. Let's remember, however, that all of this is directed towards celebrating the great gift Jesus gave us as a fruit of his death and resurrection – the Holy Spirit. It would be good if we could decorate our altars with red flowers to mark the occasion and in the coming week say prayers to the Holy Spirit. For instance, the prayer to the Holy Spirit used for the Synod.

There is one particular effect of Pentecost that I want to highlight this year. As we read in the accounts of the First Pentecost and in Paul's letters – people of many languages and backgrounds who received the Spirit were made one even in their diversity. There is a variety of gifts among the members of the Body of Christ. But the miracle of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit brings about unity not conflict out of this variety and diversity.

Pentecost is, therefore, a great celebration of unity in diversity. Each of us is given a different gift but like various voices in a choir, together we form a harmony that sings God to the world. This should be a hallmark of our Christian community. We may be different in background, temperament and talents but we are united in Christ. Our witness and the Church's mission are wounded by divisions. Pope Francis never tires of reminding us that diversity and unity go together. Unity on its own could end up as rigid uniformity. Diversity on its own could become anarchy. We need unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

There is a specific aspect of this diversity in unity that I would like to underline. We are blessed in recent years with the arrival in our Church communities of new faces, voices and personalities due to immigration. There is now greater diversity among Irish Catholics than in the past. In our church communities we are witnessing the blessing of the presence of "new Irish" in their attendance at our church services. We can also recognise how much our schools have done to welcome, integrate and promote immigrants and refugees. Indeed, I acknowledge with gratitude the positive welcome and support of migrants on the part of so many in our parishes, religious orders and schools.

On the wider level of society, it is estimated that the number of people who live in Ireland but were born elsewhere is now reaching almost 20% of the population. In other words, almost one in five Irish citizens were born abroad. Some have come here out of choice. Others have come escaping from war, persecution, or exploitation. For the most part they are ordinary human beings like us, many indeed very talented, people who reached good careers

before they had to flee. Migrant workers and their families contribute to society and their local communities in many ways, including sports clubs, arts organisations and community associations. We know how much we benefit from their services in our society, especially in healthcare, as well as in the manufacturing and hospitality industries. They have been a key factor in Ireland's economic development. Half a million people who were not born in the State are now paying income tax here.

Polling has shown that the Irish public remains one of the most positive in the EU27 regarding their attitudes towards immigration. Of course, I recognise there are challenges. Local communities must be given the resources and infrastructures to ensure refugees and asylum seekers are welcomed and supported. Issues around asylum seekers and direct provision need urgent attention. But at a time when anti-immigration rhetoric is on the rise, we need be careful about how we see, judge and act regarding migrants. There is a temptation to blame the rise in migrants (and so to end up blaming migrants and asylum seekers themselves) for a series of woes that are besetting us such as issues to do with hospital care, the question of homelessness and the cost of housing. We sometimes hear people say, "they are stealing our jobs". Some lament the strain on public services or in schools. With growing tensions and riots, rumblings of discontent and marches, as well as social media campaigns, a mindset regarding migrants can take hold resulting in distance from, distrust of and disdain for migrants.

There is a real risk that this will be deepened in the run up to our June elections as some potential public representatives might opportunistically stir and seek to capitalise on sentiment. I would urge all candidates to act responsibly and with sensibility and sensitivity to the plight of people coming to our shores as they seek election. To do otherwise would not be in accord with our Christian values. We need to help each other resist a negative spirit regarding migrants in our conversations, our planning and our outlook. In this way, we will also avoid conflict situations that could become dangerous. Pope Francis, himself a model of a welcoming heart towards migrants and refugees, indicates to us that our calling as followers of Christ is to welcome and protect, promote and integrate refugees. We believe in unity in diversity.

This year, as we celebrate Pentecost, let us pray that we will be instruments of the Holy Spirit, knowing how to promote our Spirit-led unity in diversity and recognise with gratitude the richness of diversity that migrants bring to our church, our neighbourhood and workplace. Let's ask for this gift through the intercession of Mary, Spouse of the Spirit, Mother of the Church.

Regards,

✠ Brendan Leahy,
Bishop of Limerick.