

Sent in the power of the Spirit

By Archbishop Brad Billings

â??But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earthâ?• (Acts 1.8).

This is the promise of Jesus, given to his disciples immediately prior to his ascension. It is a promise dramatically fulfilled shortly afterwards on the Day of Pentecost, as described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

This â??power from highâ?• (Luke 24.49) enables the ministry of the disciples, in accordance with the assurance of Jesus given in the upper room speech prior to his death and resurrection, that, â??when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truthâ?• (John 16.13).

We often approach Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit as an event in time, characterised as it is by the miracle of speaking in tongues and the decisive speech delivered by Peter.

It is all of that, but much more.

For the Spirit is â??poured outâ?• for a purpose that remains as true today as it was then.

That purpose is to enable the ministry of the disciples, from the first followers of Jesus down to we who are his disciples now, to be his witnesses.

Not only does the Spirit help us to pray, and gives us words to speak when needed, but the Spirit also confers gifts (â??charismsâ?•).

In the letter to the Ephesians Paul speaks of the â??ascension giftsâ?• given by the risen and glorified Jesus; that some were to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Their task is, importantly, â??to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christâ?• (Ephesians 4.11-13).

That is, the leadership gifts are given to a select few for the express purpose of enabling the ministry of others â?? the many who make up the Body of Christ (his Church).

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul describes the variety of gifts given by the Spirit and tells the Corinthians that each gift or charism is â??activatedâ?• within the people of God, by the Spirit, for the common good (1 Corinthians 12.4-11).

Furthermore, the gifts given by the Spirit come to all of the baptised people of God. Each gift is diverse and unique as there are people â?? â??we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to usâ?• (Romans 12.6).

Each is needed for the building up of the Body of Christ, to enable its mission in the world.

Often in the church we think of, and speak about, â??my ministryâ?• in terms of what we might do inside the walls of our parish church, typically during the course of a service of worship.

And that is true and to be celebrated.

But much of the ministry exercised by the baptised people of God will take place outside of the church building, in the world around us, in the places where we live, work, study, and form community, after the weekly act of worship has ended.

For good reason do we pray, intentionally, at the conclusion of the service of Holy Communion â?? â??send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.â?•

For we do not go out into the mission field alone but empowered by the same Spirit given at Pentecost.

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