

Come, Holy Spirit, Fill Our Hearts with the Fire of Your Love

Pastoral Letter – Archbishop Dermot Farrell

AT PENTECOST, RECOGNISING THE HOLY SPIRIT at work within and among them, Mary and the Apostles took courage in their hands and opened the doors behind which they had locked themselves. They were no longer afraid of the future that was unfolding for them, no longer constrained by what might go wrong. They were ready to proclaim, to whoever might listen, their experience of what had happened to them with Jesus, their discovery of his good news, of what God had done, and was still doing, in him:

‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit’... and all who assembled were ‘each one, bewildered to hear them speaking in their own language. They were amazed and astonished’... saying ‘we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.’ (Acts 2:1-11)

As people of faith, ‘baptised and sent’, we too are encouraged, by the very same Spirit, to recognise afresh the newness and hope Christ brings into our own lives. We are called to listen to each other’s experience of the life he brings us, to live and celebrate in new ways what it means to be followers of Christ, to share his good news and consolation, to witness to ‘the marvels of God’ (Acts 2:11) today.

Our world has changed and is continuing to change. Parishes are changing too and need to find new expression, allowing new forms of pastoral care to emerge, ‘from which Christian witness can shine for the world’. (Dicastery for the Clergy, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*, 2020, 123).

It is in this spirit and in this hope that this Pentecost Letter puts before the Diocese a process which provides for initial reflection in parishes on their future. This process also sets out the formal steps to be taken, together with the Archbishop, when new parish structures and relationships are being considered: a *Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission* (May 2026).

This initiative is born out of a concern for the pastoral care and good of all Christ’s people. It is the fruit of careful consideration by the Council of Priests, as well as conversation at the Diocesan Pastoral Council and in Deaneries. Where there is a need, and following an appropriate process, the modification of parishes as envisaged here can strengthen the faith and life of our parish communities, ‘opening up new ways to accompany the people of our time and creating new possibilities for mission’ (*Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission*, p. 7).

I ask Parish Pastoral Councils and Partnership Pastoral Councils, through prayer, listening, discernment and decision-making, to find together a way into the future for their parishes locally. We are all called to work co-responsibly in the forming of vibrant and faith-filled communities, together with the families, people and clergy that serve and support these communities in their mission.

When the Church is most truly itself, when we are most truly who God calls us to be, we journey together into our common future. As I said in my homily during our Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock this year:

‘This is the meaning of synodality: it means making decisions together and not doing things or making decisions in isolation.’ (25th April 2026).

In our time, just as in the days of the Apostles, we need to accompany each other on our journey in faith, *Building Hope*. Without doubt, we must find new ways of binding ourselves together as disciples of Christ, sharing our efforts, establishing flexibility, renewing our energy. This is the challenge for the Church across the world. In the words of Pope Leo:

‘Today we need to look to the future with hope and build the hope of the future. Do not be afraid to do so!’ (Homily, Kilamba, Angola, 19th April 2026).

If we have the courage to face up to the reality of our local Church today, we will clearly see that we need to travel lighter, and that already we need to let go of many things which we considered essential, but, which now – truth be told – overburden us. The first words of Christ after his resurrection are, ‘Peace be with you.’ (John 20:19). These are always Christ’s first words to the living Church. Do not be afraid (see John 14:27). The living Church will always need the Lord’s courage and comfort, because the living Church is always going into new places, proclaiming good news to the poor, meeting people where they are, and this is – more often than not – challenging.

In the Holy Spirit, we are called to let go of what was, and open ourselves to where Christ is leading us, to embrace the hope God has for us and for all creation. Just as for the first disciples, this will mean a letting-go. There will be a sense of grief and loss, but there can also be liberation in letting go and starting anew. Is not this the sense of freedom, the renewed strength that we read about in the account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, the renewed life the Apostles received, their new hope and confidence in God?

Let us show ourselves faithful and creative, hope-filled and resilient, synodal and pro-active. Using all our charisms, gifts and ministries, the Spirit of Truth and Love will help us find new ways to express, generously, what the Church can be for all the world to see and hear:

‘There are a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord... Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ.’ (1 Corinthians 12:4-6,12)

The Spirit is already working abundantly in our midst: ‘The Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope.’ (Pope Francis, *Hope Does Not Disappoint*, May 2024, 3). Now is the time, in prayer and reflection, to deepen the renewal which has been long under way among us. We do not know what new things may be revealed when we allow Jesus to be our inspiration, and his Spirit, our guide, to fill our hearts with the fire of God’s faithfulness to us and his providence. Like Mary and the Apostles, we too may be ‘amazed and astonished’!

With hope and humility, we look to the future. May the peace of Christ, and the fullness of life he brings, be with you.

Mary, Mother of the Church, our Mother, pray for us.

Pope St John XXIII, pray for us.

Pope St Paul VI, pray for us.

Pope St John Paul II, pray for us.



+Dermot Farrell

Archbishop of Dublin

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Building Hope