

# The promise of Pentecost

## *Feast of Pentecost*

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I want to tell a story that isn't second-hand but fourth-hand. I heard this story from a friend of mine called Bob, a Uniting Church minister whom I first met when I got involved with EFM. He retells a story from William Bausch, a Catholic priest in the United States. William Bausch told of a time when a young child caught his attention at Mass. It's a great Pentecost story.

*As William Bausch tells it:*

*I watched a small child turn around and smiling at everyone. He wasn't:*

- *gurgling,*
- *spitting,*
- *humming,*
- *kicking,*
- *tearing the hymn book, or*
- *rummaging through his mother's handbag.*
- *He was just smiling.*

*Finally, his mother jerked him about and, in a stage whisper that could be heard during a high-school play, said: "Stop that grinning! You're in church!"*

*She gave him a sharp and stinging slap on the legs.*

*And as the tears rolled down his cheek, she added: "That's better," and returned to her prayers.*

*William Bausch continued. . . .*

*Suddenly I was angry. It occurred to me that the entire world is in tears, and if you're not, you'd better get with it.*

*We sing, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord", while our faces reflect the sadness of one who has just buried a rich aunt who left everything to her pregnant canary.*

*I wanted to ... [tell] this child with the tear-stained face ... about my God,*

*the happy God,*

*the smiling God,*

*the God who had to have a sense of humour to have created the likes of us.*

*I wanted to tell him that our God is an understanding God who understands little children who turn around and smile in church. And even curious little children who rummage through their mother's handbags.*

*I wanted to tell that little child I had received a few slaps on the legs for daring to smile in an otherwise solemn religious setting. By tradition, I suppose, one wears faith with the solemnity of a mourner, the mask of tragedy.*

*What a fool, I thought, this woman sitting next to the only sign of hope - the only miracle - left in our civilisation.*

*If that child couldn't smile in church, where was there left to go?*

End of William Bausch's story.

We celebrate the Day of Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples.

At Pentecost, we celebrate the completion of Easter and the resurrection.

At the first Easter, Jesus rose as an individual.

At the first Christian Pentecost, Jesus rose as a community; Jesus rose as the church.

With all its faults, the Christian Church is Christ's resurrected Body today, living in the power of Christ's Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is an opportunity we have each year to recognise the potential of what God calls us to be: Christ's resurrected body in the world today, the real presence of the crucified-and-risen Christ:

reaching out to the world with God's love in Christ;

modelling in our life together the divine multiculturalism of the Kingdom of God;

combatting all those community-destroying Babels we find in our world today: ... the Babel of racism, ... the Babel of bigotry, ... the Babel of snobbery, ... the Babel of greed, ... the Babel of competing fundamentalisms (both religious and secular), ... and many other destructive Babels;

being a community that expresses such exuberant joy in each other's presence - and in God's presence - that our neighbours naturally assume we've been hitting the bottle a bit early in the day;

being a setting in which a child can safely turn around and smile at an adult - and find the adult smiling back.

In these ways and others, Pentecost is an opportunity each year to recognise the potential of what God calls us to be: Christ's resurrected body in the world today, the real presence of the crucified-and-risen Christ.

This is the promise of Pentecost.

**AMEN**