



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Solemnity of Pentecost

Ite missa est

Readings: Ezekiel 37: 1-14, Ps 103, Romans 8: 22-27, John 7: 37-39

Among those designated as readers, as bearers and proclaimers of the Word of God, today is, by common consent and holy tradition, the short straw. It is, of course, both a privilege and a challenge to enunciate the litany of place names which make this morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles the liturgical equivalent of the Grand National.

But....Cappadocia, Phrygia and Pamphylia do not necessarily roll off the tongue. All too often readers have neglected to take advice and consequently the poor mutt in the pew (and the increasingly distressed mutt in the presidential chair) are treated to a wide and bewilderingly inaccurate series of pronunciations hitherto unknown to the ancient world.

In the midst of this linguistic chaos, perhaps appropriate to Pentecost, it is easy to lose sight of a central and significant fact. Those of you who prepare properly for the festival mass will undoubtedly be carrying about your person, a map of the ancient world. Thus you will be ahead of me. But, for those of you who have not done their homework, let me spell it out. As we trace the patterns of those ancient cities and provinces, from which the Pentecost crowd have come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage, a fascinating

picture emerges. Not only do we have representative of the Jewish communities from around the Roman Empire but even beyond into the alien and unconquered empires of Media and Parthia.

It is an immediate and astonishing announcement of something we take for granted, that is the ubiquity of the gospel and the universality of the Church. Here the world, known and unknown, witnesses the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which has inspired the Word of God and now gives birth to the Church and will send her sons and daughters to the very ends of the earth to witness to the love of God in the incarnation of His Son, the salvation of man offered through the blood of His sacrifice on Calvary and the hope of eternity in His risen and ascended life.

All of those, gathered in the Jerusalem street on this foundational and incendiary morning, will return home and speak of what they have witnessed. Years later, when the first missionaries turn up at their synagogues, there will be those who have heard this story from their fathers and grandfathers, the ground work will have been done. What they will have witnessed, and born testimony to, is, *inter alia*, the miracle by which Babel has been reversed. Every Jew will be aware of that final failure of man which occupies Genesis chapter 11. Man's vanity and unquenchable imperialism, his self-glorification and rejection of the sovereignty of God sees him gather on the plains of Shinar to build a tower that will storm the heights of heaven. The project ends in faction, fragmentation and failure – the discord and division of man. He no longer speaks one language. He is alienated both from the world of God and from himself.

It is out of this chaos and folly that one man emerges, chosen by God, Abram. Upon him and his descendants will the future and reconciliation of

all mankind, nations and tribes, depend. The far end of that new start is Pentecost, an ancient Jewish harvest festival, which now becomes the feast of the first fruits of the harvest of God, the reconciliation of man and the unity of the children of God, regardless of race, tribe or nation.

At the remove of two millennia it all seems too easy, a done deal. But it cannot have seemed so to the little band of Apostles and their companions on that long ago Jerusalem morning and there were many trials and martyrdoms ahead.

We are not the centre of empire. We are in Bodmin. We are not in Jerusalem. We are in St Mary's Road. But we are, each and every baptised disciple here, witnesses of the Pentecost, recipients of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling, sanctifying, energising, enlightening power of God.

We have heard the teaching of the Apostles. We have kept company with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and with one another. As we go back to the four corners of our known world, to Wadebridge to Padstow to Tintagel, how can we not bear witness to what we have seen and heard and known?

We are, each of us, agents of the love of God, ambassadors for the reconciliation of man. We will encounter those who dimly remember the story and those who have never heard it. Our task will be the same.

As the church, born on Pentecost, we are sent out – ITE MISSA EST – to rekindle the fire of love for God on the altar of men's hearts.

Alleluia. Amen.