

SoulSpace

SERIES: THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Season colour: **RED**

In this new series, **Gerard Moloney CSsR** anticipates the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Ireland in August 2018.

Sometimes other people are more keen on celebrating our birthday than we are. Birthdays become a reminder that we're getting old. Unless, of course, we're heading for 90 or 100, and we want everybody to know how old we are. Our birthday becomes a big deal again.

Today we celebrate the birthday of the church. Pentecost, which takes place 50 days after Easter, is regarded as the day the church was born, the moment it came into being.

The disciples have been gathered in the upper room, scared for their lives. The doors are locked. They are afraid to go outside. They had seen what happened to Jesus, how he was arrested and tortured and executed, and they are afraid the same will happen to them. So they hunch together in the room, defeated and dejected, like prey desperately trying to avoid capture.

Then something extraordinary happens. The Holy Spirit descends on them, just as Jesus had promised. They begin to feel the power of the Holy Spirit, and they become new people. They are changed, transformed from shivering cowards into missionaries on fire with joy and courage and the love of God. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they unlock the door and pour out of the room, and begin preaching the Good News of the Gospel to all they meet. On that first Pentecost, the church is born.

WE ARE THE CHURCH

So today we celebrate the birthday of the church. When we think of church we probably think of that large hierarchical institution with the pope at the top, and of which we are part by virtue of our baptism. And that is true. We are the church, so you can

say that today is our birthday too.

But the church isn't just a large institution with an elaborate structure and beautiful buildings scattered around the world. At its most fundamental, the church is every Christian family and every home. Vatican II says the family is the domestic church because it is the first place where young, baptised Christians learn about their faith. It is where we nourish our faith and live it out. You could call family the 'church of the home'.

We all share the gift of family. We know, too, that there are lots of family combinations today. The definition of family isn't as simple as it was in the past. As well as married couples, with or without children, there are couples who are living together, with or without children, lone parents, couples who are divorced and remarried, same-sex couples, single people living on their own, and so on. And along with this variety of family combinations comes a lot of challenges and prejudices. Because of who they are or their family circumstances, sometimes judgements are made about people that can cut them off from full participation in the church.

In 2016, after a long period of consultation, Pope Francis issued a letter on family life, called 'The Joy of Love'. It is a beautiful reflection on marriage and family life, and will be an important focus for the World Meeting of Families in August. This is also a timely event. So much has changed in our society in recent years that it will be an opportunity for us to celebrate the gift of family, to understand what it means to be a Christian family in the Ireland of the 21st century.

So, celebrate the church's birthday today, and celebrate also the birthday of the domestic church, your family. ■



Today's readings

Acts 2:1-11

Galatians 5:16-25

John 15:26-27;

16:12-15

The Gospel reading about the Paraclete presents quite a different picture to that of Luke in Acts.

There is no demonstration of power, no tongues of fire or the crowds being amazed by the disciples' speaking in tongues. Instead, we are confronted by a figure who will act as a guide, deepening the disciples' understanding of what Jesus has been teaching them.

The Spirit will act as Jesus has done in regard to the Father, speaking what he received from the Father. So Jesus' challenge to the world will continue and will provoke the same hostile reaction which will be directed this time at the disciples. The Spirit will preserve and inform the disciples' memory of Jesus' words, his teaching.

The Spirit will lead them into a deeper understanding of the meaning of his words and their implication for them. The truth which is mentioned in the Gospel is belief in Jesus as the sole revelation of God and the one who speaks the words of God. The Spirit will help the disciples fulfil Jesus' instruction that "if you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

GOD'S WORD TODAY



Pentecost celebrates the birthday of the church and the birthday of the domestic church - the Christian family.

Birthdays are a big deal, especially when we are young. The joy of being a year older, reaching another milestone, and, of course, all the cards and gifts and the party.

There are the significant birthdays – 18, 21 – that mark our coming of age, which we celebrate in a big way.

As we get older, birthdays tend to be less important. We don't get as excited about them. The gifts and the cards become fewer or fizzle out, unless we reach a landmark age like 40 or 50.