



Dancing with the Spirit

Celebrating Pentecost

By Fr David Ranson

It is always a great privilege for me to be present at the Family Masses of St. Lucy's School for children with special needs at Wahroonga, New South Wales. They take place once a term on a Friday evening. Often I get to the end of the week, along with everyone else, quite tired. However, I never come away from such celebrations at St. Lucy's without both being profoundly humbled by the extraordinary self-sacrifice of parents of children with autism and uplifted by the spirit of the school community and its celebrations.

Every occasion at St. Lucy's leaves an imprint on me. However, the Family Mass on the Friday before the celebration of Pentecost this year, during which we baptised five young children, was particularly special for me. It was not just the welcome of many newcomers that made such an impression, though. It was the sight of young William dancing on the carpet in front of the altar during the hymns of the Mass which stays so alive in my memory.

When I first met William some years ago the tension within his frail body was quite visible. It would be almost impossible for him to stay present during the whole Mass. His body could go rigid and his parents would most often have to take him from the room. A beautiful boy, the pain of his condition would be so striking. Now, a couple of years later, William comes to Mass and his joy is palpable. As we gather and celebrate the Mass mainly through song and music, William spontaneously takes to the centre of the gathering and dances his way through each of the songs with a freedom and a flexibility that is at one and the same time both so simple and so sacred. Though it may not be possible for any of us to know what goes on in William's mind during these times, there is no doubt that his unseen partner is the Spirit of God who overflows with delight and laughter during these times.

On the Friday evening as the Easter Season came to its close, William taught me the meaning of Pentecost. He teaches me about the nature of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God makes present the dynamism of the Resurrection. This is why the celebration of Easter and Pentecost go together. That promise of life unleashed at Easter now stirs within our own hearts, now becomes something real in our own experience. That declaration of the power of life over death at Easter begins now to transform the deathly places of our own lives, now brings something new into being, and now changes us.

The dark places are changed into places of light; the places of fear are transformed into places of love; the places of despair are made new with hope; the places of paralysis are remade into movement and dance.

Easter and Pentecost. Promise now realised.

A promise not realised in an ethereal kind of way. Rather, a promise realised tangibly as we discover within ourselves renewed courage to make decisions once again for love and for hope, even in the face of our losses and our fears.

A promise realised tangibly as whole communities begin to open up to a new sense of purpose, direction and future even in the face of its hurts and mistakes of the past.

A promise realised tangibly as small frail and rigid bones find spontaneity and movement, even in the face of such limitation, and as pain transforms into delight on a carpet in front of an altar.

At the Family Mass at St Lucy's school for children with special needs William became for me the symbol of the Spirit's genuine capacity, a living symbol of the power of what we celebrate at Pentecost. In these living symbols of the Spirit's design and delight, lies the source of our hope and our future as a living Church.

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