

PENTECOST

Once upon a time a group of powerful people set out to build a tower that would reach to heaven. They assembled architects, masons, and an army of labourers. They brought in a huge supply of the finest granite and cement. The organisers were of the same mind and spoke the same language. The plans were drawn up and the project got under way.

However there was trouble from the word go. The people involved in this wonderful project were interested in one thing only – their own glory. The tower was to be a monument to them. There was jealousy among them because each wanted to leave his mark on the tower. There was a rash of strikes. There were numerous accidents and the workplace became something of a battleground.

The workers had bitter quarrels over politics and nationalities. Materials were constantly disappearing. Costs mounted. The banks began to withdraw support, as did many of the sponsors of the project. Mistrust was rampant. The builders no longer spoke the same language. In the end the tower was abandoned.

It's a modern version of the tower of Babel. The tower is a symbol of man's attempts to create on earth a paradise without any recourse to God. Perhaps a really accurate statement about the state of our materialistic world today – an attempt to create a paradise without any recourse to God! After they had eaten the forbidden fruit, God sent the man and woman from Paradise. But what did they do? They undertook to build a paradise of their own, from which they endeavoured to banish God. But what kind of Paradise was **that** going to be?

The effort is still going on. We have massive highways, supersonic planes, nuclear power stations, manned space flights. Yet we cannot live at peace with one another.

Pentecost is meant to be a reversal of what happened at Babel. At Pentecost we have a group of people who came together, ordinary people with little faith in their own abilities, but great faith in God. They set out to build a “tower” of a different kind. This tower took the form of a new community, a spiritual stairway to heaven.

On Pentecost Day the apostles began to build this new community. They spoke a new language – the language of love and co-operation, a

language that all people of good will understand. It shines in the face and is felt in the clasp of a hand.

Today is the anniversary of this great happening. It is the birthday of the Church, the community of the followers of Jesus. On this day, thanks to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the infant Church took its first steps. That Church was and always will be made up not of saints but of sinners. Down the ages it has had its share of problems and setbacks. But it is still being built.

Part of it is assembled here today. We gather here not as rivals but as friends. Factors which normally divide people – such as class, colour, age, wealth – must count for nothing here. Here we are one family under God.

At Pentecost God, in sending the Holy Spirit, reversed the disaster of Babel which divided and confused the unity of the human family. The Holy Spirit makes known to all peoples the one true God, and so creates from the many languages of people one voice to profess one faith.

It is really a wonderful thing that began on Pentecost Sunday. We not only find shelter in this tower- we are, each one of us, invited by God to be a builder of it. Our response, of course, is a matter of our free choice, and Pentecost is for us to reflect on how we exercise that free choice to build the Church. It's a good weekend for us to reflect on how each one of us values our "engagement" in the Parish – in the work and mission of the Church, actually !! Certainly a significant number of people in the Parish have always worked to reach out – to support our East Timor mission or get involved with the St Vincent de Paul society or confront issues of social justice. But that activity will always be either limited or enhanced by the extent to which we **all** take responsibility. Unlike what happened at Babel, we need to make a place for God, to work together to "make God's Kingdom come" not only in our own lives but in our real world. We believe that we are all of us "gifted" by the Holy Spirit to do great things. Let's not ignore those gifts or leave them unpacked. That would be the ultimate ingratitude !