

PENTECOST

In July 2008, around 200,000 young Catholics from around the world travelled to Australia for World Youth Day. Its theme was taken from Jesus' words in the Acts of the Apostles: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.' Pope Benedict XVI told the young people in Sydney that the Holy Spirit would help them use their gifts to make a positive impact on the world.

It seems that this whole experience in Australia had a profound impact on the lives of many of those young people who were there. A teenager from Virginia in the USA said: 'Despite sleeping on concrete, living out of a rucksack and sharing a handful of showers with hundreds of people, I don't remember being happier'. She went on to say that 'everyone's faces showed excitement, joy and love of their neighbour – it was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen'.

In the weeks afterwards, young delegates from around the world took initiatives in their local communities. One young Sumatran began to campaign for companies to stop wasting natural resources. Another Indonesian from Sulawesi felt inspired to plant mango seedlings and other trees for free distribution to local people. A young man from Kuching archdiocese in Malaysia said he now realised that the 'Holy Spirit lives not in the church or house, but lives in us'. The experience of being together with Pope Benedict and thousands of other young people from around the world, allowed the Holy Spirit to get hold of them and lead them into a very new way of seeing things.

Once Jesus left his followers on their own – they hid. They were frightened. It took this extraordinary moment of Pentecost, the realisation that in fact Jesus hadn't left, his Spirit was still with them, to free them and urge them into a totally different way of life. The Spirit led them from the locked room not just to face the world, but to change the world. Eventually, the shekel had dropped. The Father did indeed love each and every one of them, 'from the beginning of time', as Jesus had told them – and now that the Spirit had fired them up, they realised that they had been chosen to be courageous.

How often in recent weeks have we heard the phrase: 'I did nothing wrong, everything I did was within the rules'. The phrase simply showed that 'the rules' were totally inadequate. Laws, in general, are inadequate. They exist to help us structure our lives so that the least possible damage is done to those who are poor, fragile and unable to defend themselves, by those who care nothing, are bullies, take the resources of others and are greedy and selfish. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit don't actually care about 'the rules' – they go way beyond them. Not only do they not 'break them' – they see them as inadequate.

Spirit-filled people campaign for change, so that other people are given a chance and are given choices – look at CAFOD's Unearth Justice, and Climate Justice Campaigns.

Spirit-filled people write letters to local newspapers and get involved with local radio phone-ins, bringing Gospel values – not their own prejudices and fears – to bear on issues close to the hearts of their local communities.

Spirit-filled people have fun. They work to include migrants and those seeking asylum into their communities, and learn all sorts of things about food, language, humour, legal systems, and the ways people survive.

Spirit-filled people love, are joyful, try to bring peace into all their relationships, are trustful, gentle and wise. St Paul tells us this in his letter to the Galatians – where there was obviously a load of hassle – why else would he need to say it? Whatever you think of Paul, he had courage, another sign of the Spirit in our world...

All loving God, your Spirit is dwelling deep in the hearts of each of us, urging us to work for peace, justice, reconciliation and respect for the wonderful world you have given us. We ask that you give us the courage we need to see your Holy Spirit at work within us and among us, and lead us into more joyful and courageous ways of working together for the coming of your Kingdom.

We ask this through Christ the Lord...Amen.