

Homily for the Feast of Pentecost (Year A) – May 24th 2026

Last Thursday, under the terms of canon law, I was required to write to the bishop and resign my ministry, as indeed all priests are required to do when they reach the age of 75. So I did write to him. I had been thinking about what I might do if I resigned and presumably retired from ministry – travel and see more places in the world, spend time with friends, maybe write a bit and find a way of being able to relax in peace after a long life of service – but none of those things really interest me. Then I thought about what might make me want to do this at the present stage of my life – ill health, slowing down and finding it hard to cope with the increasing demands of parish life. There is no doubt that we are in an entirely different situation from that which existed when I first began 51 years ago now. Then it was a joyous time with everyone working together to create a lively and engaging community of Our Lord's church, people offering to do all sorts of service to Him and each other. Now this is not the case and people have changed considerably – it is quite obvious that the inner commitment to Our Lord and his church is no longer there for very many people, who still count themselves as Catholics – we receive emails from people we have never seen or heard of wanting to book a baptism, like booking the cinema, with little or no thought as to what this should mean, despite the efforts of our Baptism catechists when they eventually meet together. Others have become angry, demanding or self-seeking with no thought of sacrifice in their lives, but becoming 'self-referential' in every aspect as Pope Francis used to call it. They are largely indifferent to the call of Jesus to 'do this in memory of me' and other events seem to take preference over the weekly commitment to Our Lord and our community in Holy Mass, when it simply doesn't suit their programme and plans. This I would say is the greatest challenge facing any priest now – to break this down and show people what living in Our Lord's way means and how precious a way of life it is. Each year, after the prolonged First Communion programme, most of the children and their parents disappear which is so sad, and there seems to be nothing that I can do about it. Our young people have disappeared also. 13 of them were confirmed last September and only 3 of that group are still around on a regular basis. What hopes I might have had to work with them, to produce plays and spend time together to encourage and support them have all but evaporated. Despite the fact that we are incredibly lucky in our three parishes with wonderful pastoral teams and Eucharistic ministers, able and competent Finance Committees, enthusiastic catechists and so many others performing all sorts of services quietly week in week out, many of these good people are older and there doesn't seem to be much enthusiasm from the young generation to take on their responsibilities. Many of you will tell me that if I need anything to give you a ring, but when I put a request in the newsletters, like last week and this week's such as asking last year's parents to make tea and coffee for this year's First Communion celebrations, there is no reply, as indeed there is frequently no reply to any request. I realise that our lives are much more complex and complicated now for very many reasons, but the

basic fact is that if someone really wants to do something they will find the way. It's just that encouraging you to have the heart and love of Our Lord to want to do these things is now beyond me. I have tried so hard and failed. It is something that troubles me every day and makes me want to walk away, even though at present I'm finding it difficult to walk anywhere. We are facing many challenges now, not only this 'cultivated indifference' as I call it, but with the increasing number of elderly and infirm people in their homes or residential homes, and the people arriving from all over the world to make their homes here, often in the face of prejudice and suspicion, which is terrible. More than anything I want to make our new brothers and sisters actually feel welcome and integrate them more fully into the life and service of our communities. Our future is very uncertain and I do not exaggerate. There are now no priests and those we do have may decrease dramatically if the Home Office have their way. Fr. Michael, who has been such a boon to us, needs to renew his visa to stay working here at the end of July, and it is by no means certain that this will happen. To lose him and his cheerful services to us would be a catastrophe. Whatever comes, if all of us do not actively commit ourselves to the task, there will be no church at all. And so, I wrote to the bishop as I was supposed to tender my resignation last Thursday. I told him that I could not do this as I am telling you now. The reason is very simple. For all I have said to you, I cannot leave you and I do not want to leave you. I want to stay here, even if I become infirm and incapacitated, in the same way that Fr. Terry did. This is because I love you all – you occupy all my thoughts and dreams, even still, and I cannot picture myself anywhere else. I truly love my old people to whom I take Holy Communion each week and our beautiful children who smile at me and come up to me spontaneously for a hug or a 'high five'. Can you imagine what that innocent and loving gesture from them to me means when I know what some priests have done to children in the past and constantly have to live with the shame of it? Sometimes, in the night, a huge sense of loneliness overtakes me, a feeling that very few people have understood what I was trying to say to you and do for you, and this is not a nice place to be, when you have exhausted your mind, your heart and your body and feel the togetherness in the Lord slowly but definitely fading away.

Today is the feast of Pentecost – the birthday of the Church. The day when Jesus' apostles, frightened and uncertain, feeling alone and abandoned like I often do, received the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do the most amazing things for him – things they could never have contemplated or dreamed about. This happened because in their hearts they were ready to receive God's call and his Spirit. It is the very same Spirit that all of us have received in baptism and confirmation, but the question we all have to ask today is are we ready for this, are we willing to have our lives and priorities changed so that we can live the life the Spirit gives us, or are we too frightened as to what this might mean for us or just too unwilling to change the everyday agendas of our family lives to accommodate this power of God within us, leading us to say and

do undreamed of things as these first apostles did? Last Thursday, I did not resign my ministry because I couldn't, because of you. How many of you are willing not to resign the commitment to our good Lord you made for your children in baptism and First Holy Communion, or you made for yourselves in Confirmation and marriage? That is the question of Pentecost. A question for me and for all of us. What will our answer be?