

The mystery of Pentecost: God within us! by Peter Murnane

Mathematics can frighten us sometimes. Like when astronomers tell us that they have so far found 100 billion galaxies. We know that a galaxy is a huge cluster of about 100 billion stars. If we had a complete list of galaxies, and set out to tick off one per second, without stopping, it would take us 3,170 years! So forget about counting the *individual stars* in each galaxy!

We Christians — along with Jews and Muslims — believe that God made all this, somehow. Surely it was made for a purpose, we ponder. We know that this powerful God speaks to us. How? When hear God when we wonder at the beauty of stars or the rest of nature. But also by guiding our imagination. The Jewish-Christian Bible is a few dozen books — collected over a thousand years — created by people who looked at the stars, the world, and at themselves, and were moved to describe how God created us, and is still guiding our lives. For instance the writer of Genesis, seeing how people can think and love, declared that we are each made ‘in God’s image’.

Those early writers pointed out how God looks after us, but the books of the *New Testament* show how God actually came among us as Jesus of Nazareth. He taught that God loves *every* person, even the smallest and poorest, and that it is wrong for powerful people like religious leaders and governments to hurt people. The leaders were afraid of his teaching and killed him on a cross. Then, amazingly, his friends found that he had somehow passed through death and was still with them.

They remembered that he had promised to send them his Spirit, to be with them forever. They felt this Spirit come into them in a powerful way, on the Jewish festival called Pentecost, when a mighty wind blew and ‘tongues of fire’ came to each person. God came into them!

Some of us may remember the popular song *From a Distance*, with the lyric ‘God is watching us, *from a distance*’. The truth is a lot better than that. God is not ‘at a distance’ but in fact is *within* us. And Jesus didn’t promise to send his Spirit just for the people who followed him 2000 years ago. Luke’s gospel tells us how he promised something even more amazing than the galaxies. One day, when he was teaching, Jesus pointed to some parents and said that if *they* love their children and know how to them good gifts, how much *more* will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask! (Luke 11:13) Not only do we have God within us: we can ask for more! So if Pentecost reminds us that God is always inside us, we can find strength to love others when it is difficult, and so make life better all around us, and do our bit to heal the whole planet.

- Peter Murnane O.P.