

## ARCHBISHOP MARK COLERIDGE HOMILY AT PENTECOST

### *Laudato Si* Launch 2022

Pentecost looks back to two moments early in the biblical story. First, it looks back to the very beginning when, we are told, the breath of God moved through the darkness and over the waters of chaos. The first sound of the Bible is God breathing in the darkness. But then the divine breath hits the divine vocal chords and we hear the first word of Scripture. God says, “Light!” and, we are told, there was light. This word, then, is power – power enough to create, to bring something from nothing, to bring light from darkness, fulness from emptiness, order from chaos. That’s the first thing God does in the biblical story, and it defines what God will do throughout. The thing God is best at is bringing something from nothing.

It’s this story that the Gospel of John echoes when through a locked door Jesus enters the room where the disciples are. It may have been daytime, but the room was full of darkness, because the disciples had seen Jesus die an atrocious death and they thought they could be the next to get the chop. But then, “Light!” The one whom they saw dead appears among them – unquestionably alive, though in some new way they couldn’t understand. His first word is, “Peace!” And then his first action is to breathe on them. This takes us back to the beginning of the biblical story. Jesus breathes into them this time the Holy Spirit who, again though in a new way, brings light out of darkness, fulness out of emptiness and order out of chaos. This is the new creation that comes with Easter once Jesus rises from the dead.

The creation and the new creation bring order out of chaos, but sin, the Bible tells us, does the opposite. It brings chaos out of order. After the story of the Fall in chapter 3 of Genesis, we have a great narrative arc from chapter 4, with Cain's murder of Abel, to chapter 11, where we have the story of the Tower of Babel and the confusion it produces. That narrative arc tells of the uncreating power of sin, how it takes the order that God has brought from chaos and turns it into chaos once again.

That could well be the story of where we are now in assessing the condition of the planet which is our common home, the earth given to us by the creating God so that we might live from it and be its stewards within the great network of creation. Sin has done its work once again, bringing chaos out of God's order. The garden becomes a desert; the home becomes a death-trap; the gift becomes a curse.

Our task as God's stewards is to do all we can to stop and reverse the lethal process sin produces. As the Church, our task – never clearer than at Pentecost – is to receive more deeply the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus breathes into us and then to breathe that same Spirit into a dying planet. Left to our own devices, caring for our common home will be not much more than politics, economics and ideology. That's when the bickering starts and nothing gets done. We're left with all talk and no action, as the creation begins to unwind and we head back into the darkness, the emptiness and the chaos.

That brings us to the second moment early in the biblical story which Pentecost evokes: the Tower of Babel. Building the Tower is an attempt by human beings to storm heaven, but it leads only to universal chaos, symbolised in the many tongues of people who can't understand each other. From this story we have the English word "babble"; and that's what we often hear in talk about the

ecological crisis we face. It's just babble – a confusion that paralyses and makes the chaos worse.

That's why again we need the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the undoing of Babel. All the visitors to Jerusalem, we are told, hear the Galilean disciples speaking in their own language. "How is that we hear, each of us in our own language?" they ask. Instead of confusion there's understanding; instead of chaos there's order. But it's all the work of the Holy Spirit.

So too now we call upon the Holy Spirit – and who else but the Church would do this? and when better to do it on Pentecost Sunday? We call upon the Holy Spirit to give us words to speak that others will understand, so that all of us can move beyond the babble to work together with real action to care for our common home. A common language, common commitment, common action – to care for our common home: that's what we need now. That's what Pope Francis calls for in *Laudato Si*.

In chapter 2 of Genesis, the Bible makes a revolutionary claim about the human being. In the wider world that produced the Scripture, it was generally thought that God created human beings because he needed slaves to do the dirty work in the garden. But the Bible sees things differently. It has God calling the human being and asking him to name the newly formed creatures. This simple but revolutionary touch makes the human being not a slave but a co-creator with God – a creature yes, but a creature possessed of a unique and magnificent dignity as co-creator with God, working with God to bring light out of darkness, fulness out of emptiness and order out of chaos. The same God calls us now, his new Adams, in the same way. We are to work with God to order the chaos, to care for our common home: that's what it means for us to be God's stewards.

That's why on this Pentecost Sunday we focus more clearly than ever on the task before us at this time and commit ourselves to the task with the energy that comes from faith. Pope Francis has shown the way in *Laudato Si*, which offers a vision and a language which are deeply biblical and thoroughly Catholic. It's up to us to listen to the prophetic word he speaks as Peter and to act together as the co-creators God calls us to be. If we can do that, we will join in creation's great song of praise; if not, we will join in the great lament for the ruined garden.

+Archbishop Mark Coleridge

PENTECOST SUNDAY 2022: Laudato Si' Action Plan Launch

*Archdiocese of Brisbane*

To find out more about our plan, visit

<https://brisbanecatholic.org.au/life/laudato-si/>