

7th June 2025

Birthdays

**"A birthday – and now a day that rose
With much of hope, with meaning rife –
A thoughtful day from dawn to close:
The middle day of human life."**

Jean Ingelow, *A Birthday Walk*

Tomorrow, we have a birthday. For it will be Whit Sunday, Pentecost, 50 days after Easter (from the Greek *pentecostē*, meaning "fiftieth day"), when we remember the descent of the promised Spirit of God on the waiting and expectant disciples. We're going to commemorate the birthday of the Christian Church. We celebrate Christmas and Easter, and rightly so, for they help us focus on the life of Christ. But we should give equal – or even more – focus to the Day of Pentecost, the day the Church began.

Much will be made of Pentecost, in preaching and reflection, in singing old and new hymns about the Spirit of God, and in contrasting our discipleship from the commitment of the Apostles. So let my take be a little different, inspired by the approach to birthdays from the pen of the Jean Ingelow, the 19th century English author and poet.

Pentecost, any birthday, is a day of hope. The poet, Alexander Pope, once referred to a birthday as "the funeral of the former year". That sounds harsh, but it's true. Whatever the past has contained, it has gone. All that matters now is a new beginning, facing a hopeful, uncharted, but exciting future. The 18th century poet, Lucy Larcom, wrote, "Whatever with the past has gone, the best is yet to come." That's the promise of a birthday, and surely it rings true for the Church on Pentecost. We *have* a hopeful future. Can we face it believing that "the best is yet to come" for us?

So, tomorrow will be like Jean Ingelow's "middle day", moving on from the past, of course, *and* a hopeful, new beginning too, as we launch into a year of the unknown. But today is also a staging post on a journey, the centre of what the Church is and what it stands for. It's a time to reassess, recommit, continue to be about God's business. It's yet another day, among many, when we are blessed by the Spirit of God.

"A thoughtful day from dawn to close"? Oh, yes! For there is much to be thought about on Pentecost. But isn't that true of *every* birthday?

A prayer for today

Dear Church: Many happy returns! May you have many more like this.