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Oliver Iwuchukwu

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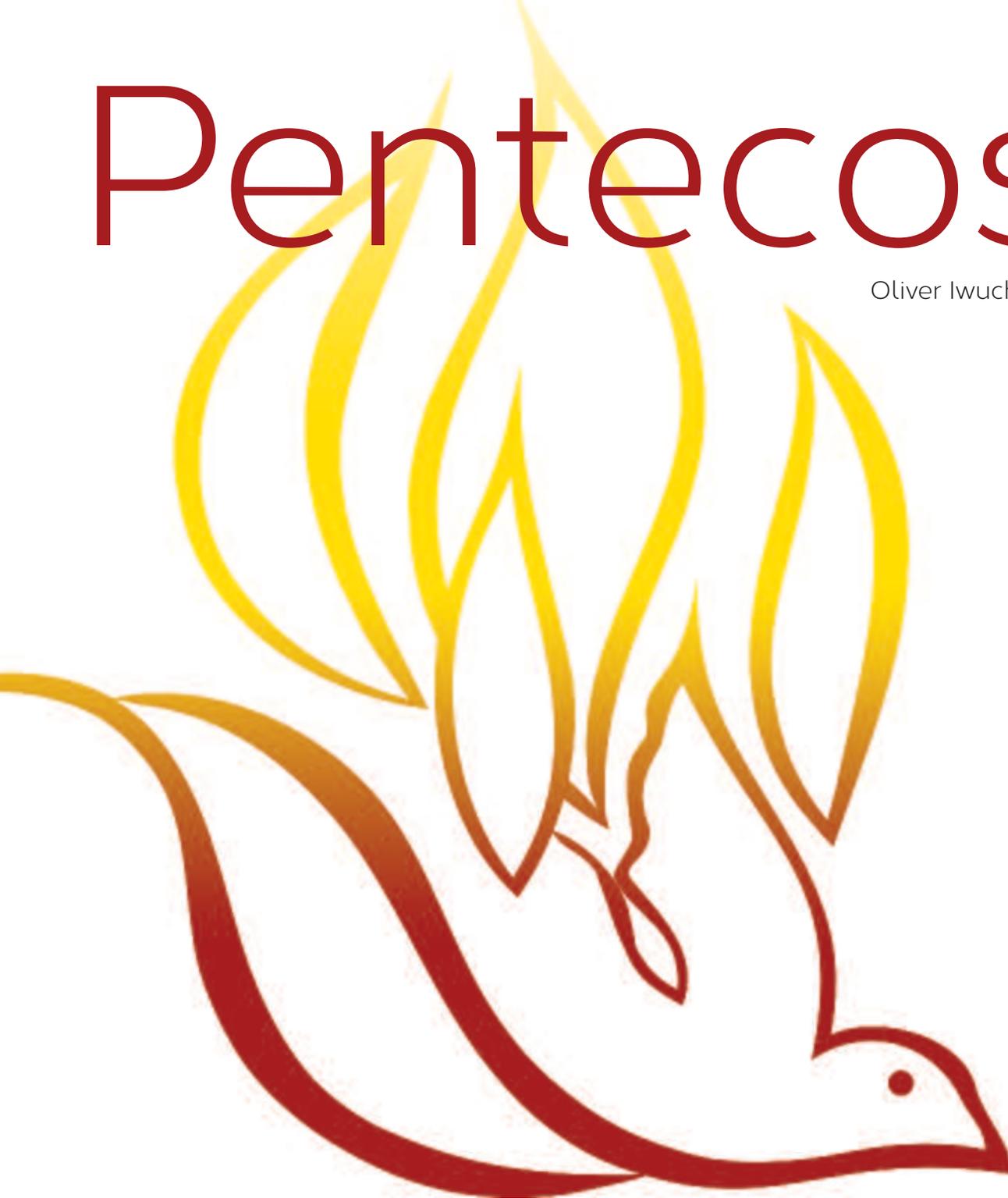
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Pentecost

Oliver Iwuchukwu CSSp



L

ast Sunday, after the 9.00 a.m. Mass, I heard our organist play a familiar tune: *Go ye afar*. I wondered why. Then I remembered that Pentecost was around the corner and that this hymn, the Spiritan Missionary Hymn, would be sung on the Feast of Pentecost – a tribute to the Spiritan missionary spirit.

The hymn took my mind back to 1885 when the Irish Spiritans came to my part of Eastern Nigeria to tell my people about Jesus Christ. They were four young men in their prime, “deliberately picked,” according to Fr. John P. Jordan CSSp, “for a hazardous and dangerous enterprise.” They journeyed for two long months, by sea. Their destination, known to them only by hearsay, was a far-away land: the homeland of a people of a different race, language and culture. In those days, relative to that part of the world, to go afar meant to be literally

uprooted from home, from family and friends, from a familiar zone of comfort and security – no radio, no telephone, no mail box, no internet. It was indeed a hazardous and dangerous enterprise.

This, among other things, is what the Spiritan missionary hymn tried to capture in three words: *Go ye afar*. Going afar demanded a lot of courage – the courage to try something difficult, different and new with a view to something better. And courage, as we know, is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – that Divine Spirit who has a way of breaking down the walls behind which people shield themselves from the rest of the world, apparently secure in their isolation, but prisoners of fear – fear in the face of real or imagined threats to life they are used to, and are comfortable with.

Prisoners of fear, indeed. We think of the disciples huddled together behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. When

the Holy Spirit descended on them, their fear gave way to courage. They began to build bridges of understanding and fellowship across cultures. This is what we recall as we celebrate the feast of

The Holy Spirit has a way of breaking down the walls behind which people shield themselves from the rest of the world

Pentecost: a significant moment in the project of renewing the face of the earth to make it a better home for all.

The responsorial psalm which we sang is a beautiful prayer: *Lord, send forth your spirit and renew the face of the earth*. God's answer to this prayer is to use us to bring about this renewal.

Such was the use he made of the four Irish Spiritans who left their home in 1885 for West Africa. They began a project that has transformed the face of that part of the world. Such is also the use God is making of us today. In the spirit of Pentecost, we are challenged to break down the different walls we have built around ourselves – obstacles that prevent us from extending a hand of fellowship to the stranger: people of a different race, language or way of life. Foremost among these obstacles are fear and prejudice. These can keep us isolated and far away from each other even though we live in the same neighborhood and worship in the same church.

As we pray, asking the Lord to send forth his Spirit to renew the face of the earth, let us also pray for the courage to follow where the Spirit leads so that the renewal we pray for may begin with us. ■



The Spiritans celebrate Pentecost Sunday 2016. The Libermann Award was presented to two members of the Spiritan Investment Advisory Board, Gerry O'Connor and Michael Mugan. From left to right: Paul McAuley CSSp, Vinh Tran (Deacon), Joe Kelly CSSp, Gerry O'Connor, Louis Cassidy CSSp, Francis Folleh CSSp, David Okenyi CSSp, Michael Mugan, Barney Kelly CSSp, Oliver Iwuchukwu CSSp, Anthony Adusei CSSp, Andrew Kemp (Deacon), Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp.