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## From the Editor: In weakness, strength

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# In weakness, strength

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

**P**entecost has come and gone. We recalled a frightened group, huddled together in a borrowed building, the doors locked, the future uncertain, the present far from safe. They were not very numerous, but they had each other. Some among them claimed to have met Him since he died. They were asked to tell their story again and again. They never told it the exact same way — how could they capture it in a single telling?

And then — the rush of a violent wind — tongues of fire — one tongue per person — turning the key from within, opening wide the door — out they went, going public with their proclamation of the risen Christ. Christianity and the church were born.

Luke wanted us to know that this new religion was for all the world — his world was north and east and south of the Great (Mediterranean) Sea: the world of the Parthians, Medes and Elamites; the world of Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, the world of Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and North Africa, the island of Crete, the Arab world — the Roman world of Luke's day — the known world.

Our known world and our church are much more vast, much more varied. “Led by a man from Argentine, more diverse than it has ever been.”

## Limitations and inadequacies

Our Spiritan group too is more diverse than it has ever been — and maybe more fragile. Our leader, Fr John Fogarty, wrote to us this Pentecost: “The term ‘fragile’ has become commonplace in our Spiritan vocabulary of recent years ... As a Congregation we have become much more conscious of our limitations and our inadequacies in different parts of the globe for a wide variety of reasons — the experience of diminishing and aging personnel in many of our older Provinces; the lack of young people who wish to identify with our way of life in countries where Spiritan vocations once flourished; inadequate financial resources, sometimes even to meet basic needs, in several of our newer circumscriptions (groups); disunity and division among the members of a circumscription; the realization of our mistakes and failures, as groups or as individuals, to live our missionary religious vocation authentically ... All of this is compounded by the fact that the Church itself has lost much of its credibility of recent years as an authoritative source of hope and direction for others.

Today we are being invited to embrace a sense of mission based not on strength, as perhaps in former times, but rooted in fragility and powerlessness.”

John Fogarty recalled our fragile Spiritan beginnings, its growth, its reduction to a handful of members, its infusion of new blood through a young convert from Judaism (Francis Libermann), its initial missionary venture to West Africa ending in disaster, tensions within the small community, doubts about Libermann's leadership, its extremely limited resources. “Altogether we are a poor lot,” wrote Libermann.

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“The Samaritan woman at the well would never have met Jesus if she'd had a water supply at home.” — Margaret Silf

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## The church our founder intended

But, John Fogarty recalled St Paul: “It is when I am weak that I am strong.” Then came a question: “The strong church is tempted to be very self-sufficient and very self-important. It looks down on others as superior on inferior. It becomes high and mighty. But is it the church our founder intended?”

He quoted Margaret Silf: “It is in what we lack that we are most open to what we will become. The Samaritan woman at the well would never have met Jesus if she'd had a water supply at home.”

## Jean Vanier

Back in the early 1970s we had John Vanier for morning Mass and breakfast in our formation house on Clarendon Avenue, Toronto. The previous night he had spoken to a packed Massey Hall downtown. Around our small dining room table, wearing the shirt and jacket he wore the previous night, he ate what was set before him. He spoke English with a French accent. He thanked us for the opportunity of joining us that morning. He shook hands and said goodbye.

Why does that morning breakfast stand out in my mind? Not just because Jean Vanier came to Mass, but because he was so ordinary, so down to earth, so one of us. He could have been any overnight guest. ■