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Pentecost means testifying without fear—and loving one another

Stammapostel Schneider am Altar in Darmstadt
(Deutschland)

Zurich/Darmstadt. Participants from all around the world joined in the Pentecost service with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider. He preached in English to a global congregation—a familiar image on Pentecost. What was unusual this year was the technology at work behind the scenes: owing to the corona pandemic, the divine service reached the living rooms of the believers by live stream.

“A special celebration of Pentecost”—that was how the international Church leader described it from the start. “We are assembling under special circumstances this year. We cannot come together as usual, we cannot celebrate Holy Communion, and we have no explanation for it.” He pointed out that many members are currently facing great challenges in life. He went on to point out that, although God had changed the plans of man, He had not changed His plan! He is and remains the God of love and of comfort.

The Church leader also preached about freedom, the courage to profess, and unity. A Bible passage from 2 Corinthians 3: 17 served as the basis for the service: “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” The Holy Spirit makes us free to serve and to love. He permeates human beings as a divine power. “Through Him we are liberated from fear, and can become an instrument in the hand of God,” emphasised the leader of the New Apostolic Church.

Liberated from fear

At the time of the very first Pentecost, believers filled with the Holy Spirit began to prophesy. Their fear over the reaction of the people had completely disappeared. Filled with the power of God, they proclaimed the gospel, irrespective of gender, age, or social status—so the book of Acts relates. “Today it is our turn! We too are called to proclaim the praises of God, to profess our faith in Christ, and to allow others to discover the love of God for them through our words and deeds,” appealed the Chief Apostle. The Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule are still valid today.

“In this difficult time it is also an expression of our love for God when we take better care of our earth,” emphasised the Church leader. Although we all want to go to heaven, we live here on this earth. We are responsible for what happens to the earth. Even from a New Apostolic perspective it is important to take care of our natural resources.

Liberated from prejudices

The Chief Apostle also mentioned another point of emphasis from the account in the book of Acts: “The Christians in Jerusalem at the time showed great solidarity with one another. There were gigantic differences in the congregations: many different cultures and religions had come together. But the power of the Spirit within them produced a radical change. “And the same still applies today!” The Chief Apostle gave an example: special rules are in effect due to the present security measures associated with the corona virus. If only a single person fails to comply with these safety rules, many others in his surroundings could be affected! “That is also how it is with the body of Christ. We are all members of the body of Christ, and we cannot afford to think only of ourselves.”

And he went on to mention another example: there are many people in society who were not so valued prior to the corona pandemic, but “now we suddenly realise how important their work really is.” Solidarity among one another is indispensable, stressed the Church leader. We must overcome our own interests and learn to value everyone equally. “Let us be one, let us be in solidarity with one another!” And with a view to the future he said, “Today we have the opportunity to decide to change. When we come back to gather in our local congregations, do we want to be exactly the same as we were before? Or do we want to do better than before?” The Spirit of God enables us to overcome prejudices, forgive the offences of others, and be there for our neighbour. “Let us prove that Christ is present in His church!”

The example of Peter

District Apostle Rainer Storck, who—as host from the District Church of Western Germany—was also present for this service, recalled the situation of Peter: he denied the Lord three times before the crucifixion because he was afraid. But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, he was filled with power, and so professed Jesus Christ. When he was arrested for this, he even expressed that we ought to obey God more than man.

A great big world in miniature

The conclusion of the divine service was as international as it was impressive: a total of 1,605 musicians and singers from 50 different countries around the world came together—virtually, and without the stress of travel—to perform the closing hymn. The [International Virtual Choir](#) performed four verses of the hymn: “What a friend we have in Jesus”.

The international Church leader chose the New Apostolic congregation in Darmstadt for this international divine service broadcast. It is not far from there to the Church’s publishing house in Neu-Isenburg where all the necessary technology resides. A large virtual congregation of New Apostolic Christians from all around the world was thus able to see and hear the sermon of the Church leader. This year, with all the strict safety and hygiene measures associated with the corona pandemic in nearly every country of the world, the Pentecost service was made available as a freely accessible signal by internet or, as was the case in South Africa, on its own TV channel, known as NAC TV.

In Darmstadt itself, a small congregation was permitted to assemble this Sunday for the first time in months—amounting to 44 participants in the large church. The congregations are very gradually beginning to open up for regular divine service operations.

A look back over Pentecosts past

Visitors to the central [website](#) of the New Apostolic Church will find recaps of Pentecost celebrations as far back as the year 2007. There they can read about Pentecosts past. And since the event used to incorporate a special message from the respective Chief Apostle each year, those messages have also been included there.

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