

structures that would be necessary to sustain already existing communities for the coming generations.

What we see in the New Testament is an evolving idea of Church – meeting new situations and developing new structures to meet them. We see a strong sense of the Church as the gathering of the local community, each with its own individual strengths and weaknesses. Parallel with that, we see constant references to the authority of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul.

Our local Churches today are the successors of the New Testament communities. And like the Early Church we have to develop and respond to the challenges of the world in which we live. We must constantly seek out methods of winning the world to Christ. We do this along with and linked to the authority of Peter and Paul, an authority which is handed down from generation to generation to the Popes and Bishops of the Church (Apostolic Succession).



### **Spreading the Good News**

No religion ever spread so rapidly. St. Peter's preaching converted 3000 people on Pentecost day itself. The Faith, called at first 'The Way', spread like wild-fire through the Jewish communities of Palestine, Samaria and Syria. Within 30 years of the death & resurrection of Christ it had spread right through the known world.

The key figure in the explosion of Christianity to the non-Jewish world was Paul. Born in Tarsus, in modern day Turkey, he was a Pharisee who studied in Jerusalem. He was fanatical in his persecution of Christians. After his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus he went from city to city preaching the Good News and founding Christian communities.

## The Birth of the Church



### **Questions:**

People used to say of the early Christians, "See how they love one another". To what extent do you think we are successful or unsuccessful at attracting other people to our faith by the way we live?

As a parish, how could we more effectively spread the Good News of Christ?

This evening, we will be concentrating on the Early Church, but that is not to say that our faith today suddenly began 2,000 years ago. Jesus was a Jew. He was a descendant of Abraham and had a great respect for Jewish faith, law and history. The birth of Jesus was the fulfilment of a promise made to the Jews. The story of the Jews before Jesus is our story too.

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In one sense the history of the Catholic Church began long ago in the days of Abraham, when God chose a small group of nomadic tribesmen to be his special friends. The Old Testament is, in fact, the turbulent story of how God gradually formed these nomads into a united people – the Chosen People.

So there is a very strong link between the people called by God in the Old Testament and the people called by Christ. The Jews looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. He would bring them even closer together and lead them to salvation. Tragically only a few would accept him.

### The Apostles

For three years, Jesus travelled around preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Gradually, he began to gather around him a small group of followers whom he instructed very carefully. These were to form the nucleus of the new people of God.



It was from among these that Jesus chose twelve disciples to be the leaders of his Church. They were to be sent out on his business and so he called them “apostles” (in Greek, the word means “those who are sent”). See Luke 6:12-16.

However, when Jesus was arrested, the apostles were nowhere to be found. Even Peter pretended that he was not a follower of Jesus. With the crucifixion of Jesus they gave up. Some even thought about going back to fishing. It was as though they had been abandoned by God!

Do people have this experience today?

Is it hard to imagine the apostles feeling this way?

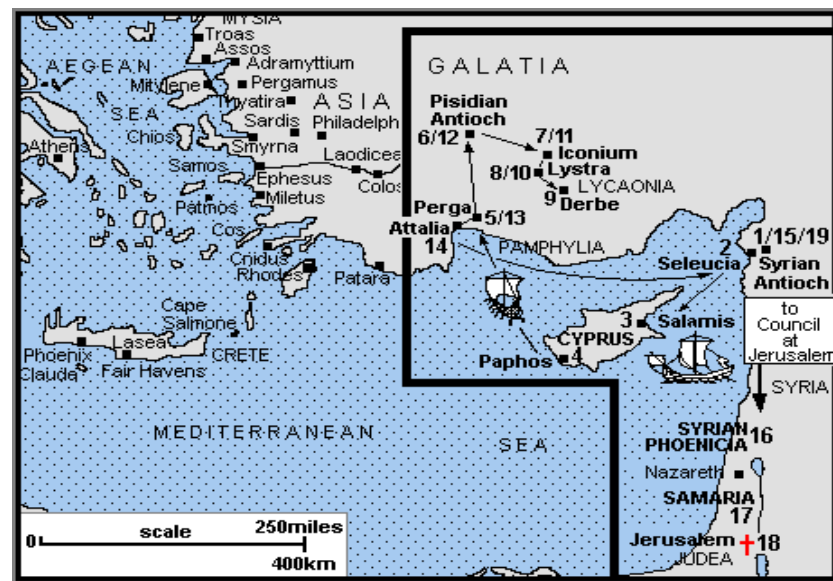
What was the outcome of all this?

### The Pentecost Explosion

At Pentecost, the Church exploded into life in the wind and fire of the Spirit. Some of the crowd even accused Peter of being drunk. What they were seeing was the transforming power of the Holy Spirit on the lives of ordinary people. Just before the Ascension, the apostles had asked “Are you now going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” They didn’t get the answer they wanted, but a fairly

clear hint about the nature of the Kingdom of God: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, then you will be my witnesses to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

### The World of the Church- 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD



#### A.D.

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| 27 Jesus begins his public ministry in Galilee                             | 45 Paul begins missionary journeys   |
| 30 Jesus is crucified. Pentecost arrested. Peter preaches & converts 3,000 | 58 Paul returns to Jerusalem, is   |
| 34 Conversion of Paul  | 64 Peter begins preaching in Rome<br>Peter & Paul martyred in Rome<br>Churches now founded in most<br>Graeco-Roma cities from<br>Jerusalem to Rome |
| 37 Foundation of Church at Antioch   |  |

#### Paul’s Letters

Paul’s letters give us some idea of the main problems confronting the early Christian communities; the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:17-34), collections for the Churches (2 Cor: 8-9) and eating with pagans (Gal. 2:11-14). Later on, letters to Timothy and Titus show how the Church was becoming more organised. At first, the followers of Jesus had thought that he would soon return to earth (Thessal.) but now they could see that it would not be so soon. So they developed