

Sermon for Pentecost

Text: John 7:37-39

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.



The Spirit Speaks

On this day, we in the Church celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit to which God directed prophesy to Moses and the Elders in the wilderness; The Spirit which our Lord calls the Helper, and which he promised shortly before his crucifixion; the Spirit which descended from heaven with a mighty wind and anointed the apostles as with tongues of fire. This is the Spirit of whom we confess that he is the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. Today we celebrate the arrival of this Spirit not only upon the apostles, but upon the whole Church, the sum total of the baptized--upon even you and me, to whom he gives faith and life.

This same Spirit--the same one that fell upon the apostles in Jerusalem--rests on each of us. He made his entrance into our lives first at Holy Baptism, and now, through the Word of God, he continually rests upon our hearts and souls. Through the same Word of God, the Holy Spirit does for us exactly what Christ our Lord promised he would do.

He strengthens our faith, keeping us within the mystical body of Christ, even though we cannot now see Christ, our Lord. He glorifies Jesus, for when he speaks to us, he speaks what he has heard from the mouth of Christ and delivers it to us through the prophets and apostles who authored the Holy Scriptures. By strengthening our faith and glorifying Jesus; by speaking to us what Christ would have us know, the Holy Spirit blesses us by leading us into all truth, for even Jesus calls him the Spirit of Truth.

But the Holy Spirit also works upon us in ways that are discomfiting and challenging. As Jesus says,

"He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." [St. John 16.8b-11]

The Holy Spirit, which lives among us and inside us, convicts us also of our sin. He shows us that even the most seemingly minor sin in fact makes us idolaters and betrayers of Christ. The Holy Spirit convicts us concerning righteousness, by reminding us that even though we cannot see Christ, he is our righteousness. And as our righteousness, Christ is even now in our Heavenly Father's

presence pleading for mercy on our behalf, while at the same time revealing himself here and now through His holy word read and preached, and in his precious body and blood given us in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit convicts us concerning judgment, reminding us that the ruler of this world, Satan, is judged--condemned for leading rebellion against God and there is no good reason whatsoever to follow in his steps, because they lead only to the eternal fires of hell. By this work the Holy Spirit challenges us to fear and love God above all things; He urges us to trust in Christ as our righteousness before God the Father and receive his righteousness in Word and Sacrament. And the Holy Spirit holds the judgment of Satan before us daily that we may escape the tortures of damnation and live forever with God following the final judgment.

These are the works of the Spirit among us. But so long removed from that Pentecost some 2000 years ago, it can at times be very difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit is at work here among and within us. Our experience calls into question everything we've just heard about the Holy Spirit. In my life, I have never heard any mighty wind from heaven come rushing down into my house or my church or anywhere else, for that matter. I have never seen any flames come to rest on my own head or any faithful Christian. I have never been given the ability to speak in languages I haven't studied, and I have never heard anyone spontaneously speak a foreign language and so declare the mighty and glorious works of God. I would guess your experience isn't all that different from mine. But all those things did happen to the apostles and all those people gathered in Jerusalem. They felt the mighty wind. They saw the tongues of fire. They heard the apostles speaking in tongues they had no way of knowing. Which leads me to

ask, and perhaps you've asked it, too: Why don't those things seem to happen anymore? Why don't they happen to me, or to you or anyone else?

Well, I don't pretend to have all the answers, but this I know from God's word. The main purpose of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost was this: to make Christ known to people. Yes there was a mighty, rushing wind, used by God to get folks' attention. Yes, there were tongues of fire, perhaps to captivate the people and keep them interested long enough to hear what St. Peter had to say. Yes, the apostles spoke in tongues, but there was great need, for there were people there that day from every corner of the earth. And what was the end result of it all? Jesus was proclaimed as crucified, resurrected, and exalted to the right hand of God. Jesus was proclaimed as attested by God to the world in miracles, wonders and signs. Jesus was proclaimed as crucified and put to death by his own lawless, faithless people. Jesus was proclaimed as raised up from the dead, his body having not seen decay. Jesus was proclaimed as exalted to the right hand of God the Father as both Lord and Christ. And by this great work of the Holy Spirit some three thousand souls were rescued from eternal death and damnation and were added to the number of those who believed in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The Holy Spirit came with a mighty wind and used his power to bring souls to faith--in Christ. The Holy Spirit came with tongues of fire and lit the way to everlasting life--in Christ. The Holy Spirit spoke through the apostles and communicated faith--in Christ--to the hearts of three thousand men and women. That's what Pentecost is all about. The Holy Spirit turns us to Christ by his power. The Holy Spirit lights the way for us, to life in Christ by

enlightening our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit speaks to us, using words that we can understand, and by those words he rescues us from eternal death and condemnation, for by his work among us and within us we have come to believe in Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

The Spirit's work may not be so flashy as I imagine it was that day in Jerusalem. But the Holy Spirit is by no means any less effective for us than he was for them. By God's grace, the Holy Spirit calls us to faith and life by the gospel, just as he did those three thousand so long ago. By God's grace, the Holy Spirit calls us into the glorious light of God by enlightened us with His gifts, even if he doesn't do it with tongues of fire upon our heads. By God's grace the Holy Spirit sanctifies each of us--makes us holy--and keeps us in the true faith of the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church by his mighty, powerful presence. That's what happened on Pentecost when the Spirit made his appearance in Jerusalem. And that's what happens every time we gather here for worship. It's what happens every time we bow our heads in prayer; every time we open our Bibles and hear the word of God pour down like rain upon our souls. The Holy Spirit is among us, showing us Christ, strengthening our faith, and leading us into all truth. About that, there is no doubt.

Christ promised us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come, and will remain with us to the very end of the age, opening our eyes of faith, and fixing them on Jesus, the author and completer of our faith. This is most certainly true. Amen.