

Pentecost

The Forty Day Feast, our Easter joy, when we proclaim the goodness of the Father in bringing forth his Son victoriously from the grave is concluded. He greeted his astonished apostles. He commissioned them for the work of the spread of the Gospel. He promised them an heavenly inheritance, that is the very Spirit of God. Then he ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father to rule above all earthly powers. Yes, he had once come into the capitol city of Jerusalem, humble, and riding on a donkey. We too stood with the crowds that day and cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David. May the Lord bless you!" Yet, we acclaimed him then only as King of the Jews, the long awaited Messiah. But because he humbled himself, and received in his mortal body the death of the cross, his Father has highly exalted him, and bestowed upon him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Yet, while the Creation still rings with praises to our ascended king there is a sadness as well. The incarnate son has taken his flesh and has departed. The teacher of holy wisdom has gone away. The mighty champion over death and the grave has

left the ranks and we wonder who will take our part against the enemy. What has become of the comfort we enjoyed knowing that he was with us, even to the end of the age?

But this day, the Feast of Pentecost, our joy is made complete, for we are not left comfortless. We have received help from above! For Jesus himself promised, "I will not leave you comfortless." On Pentecost, the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the whole company who hid with the Disciples. As though a mighty storm had broken upon them, the very Spirit of God, the third person of the most holy Trinity came to them. There was wind and there was fire. For upon each one of them there stood shining tongues of flame. Yet it was not simply that their heads were kindled, nor their faces that were brightened. No! Their hearts and minds were set ablaze for the Lord Jesus Christ. Where there once sat cowards, quaking for fear of the Sanhedrin and Romans, now there came lions for men. They poured out into the public square proclaiming the Gospel of the one who was dead and is gloriously alive.

But we may rightly ask, why it is that this great gift of the Holy Spirit should have been delivered upon Pentecost? Could not the Father and the Son have given the Helper immediately upon Jesus' sitting down upon the heavenly throne? All things are possible with God, but it is truly right and a good thing that the Spirit came upon Israel's feast of Pentecost. For it was Israel's feast. When God brought his children out of slavery in Egypt he brought them through the wilderness. And on the fiftieth day, that is Pentecost, he made them make camp at the foot of Mt. Sinai. There they received the very word of God, the Law given to Moses. And in it we find that the Lord commanded his children to keep a feast 50 days after the Passover, giving thanks for the wheat harvest. Word and Harvest. Presence and Produce. And we have the fullness of it, more than we could have hoped, in the giving of the Holy Ghost. For the Lord had given his Law to the people, and yet they were strangers to it, and it to them. Though they honored it with their lips, yet their hearts were far from it. But the prophet Ezekiel foretold of a day when the Lord would save his people. "A new heart I will give you", prophesied Ezekiel, "and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you

to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” The Word of God was no longer written upon tablets of stone, but it had come with the Spirit into their very hearts. And what harvest do we celebrate upon this feast? We have no wheat in our hands to wave before the Lord. Instead, we rejoice at the full harvest of Pentecost of the Holy Ghost. On that day 3,000 souls were baptized and added to the Faith. And what can we say of the 2,000 years since? The seed of the Gospel has been sown to the four corners of the Earth and the Holy Ghost has brought in a harvest of every tongue and nation.

Now, having briefly considered the glory of this day let us consider who it is that we have received and who it is that we welcome. It is none other than the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Hear again the words of the Nicene Creed, “And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.” The Spirit is a person, even as the Father and the Son are persons; distinct from them both; proceeding from them both; unified together with them; same in substance; equal in power and in glory. He has his specific

ministry – manifesting the power of God and the word of God to his creation. Before time, the Spirit of God hovered over the chaos and brought forth Creation. By him the prophets spoke boldly, calling the children of Israel to repentance and faith. In the fullness of time the Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary and conceived in her womb the very Son of God. At the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the Spirit descended in form of a dove, confirming him as Messiah and supplying him with the gifts to perform his saving ministry. By that same Spirit the Father raised his Son from the grave, not allowing his body to see corruption, thereby vindicating him and showing him to be the rightful king of the whole world. All this he did before the day of Pentecost. That is to say, all this he did before his greatest work.

Indeed the inspiration of Patriarch and Prophet is a mighty work. And again, his ministry as agent of the Incarnation and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus is a mysterious and miraculous work. But now that he has been poured out upon the Church and into our hearts, he works to make the whole world new. It is he that brings new creation. It is he that brings to life what once was dead. It is he that sanctifies the Christian and makes him a child of God. For Jesus spoke to

Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” What is the natural condition of human beings? It is fleshly. It is consumed with the needs and desires of our mortal condition. God is far from the mind of the natural and fleshly person. So St. Paul writes, “Their God is their belly, they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” We may ask, who can blame them? If it is the case that there is no God, then there is no other master than our own desires. We live only to serve ourselves.

But by God’s mercy he gives the Holy Ghost and it is his ministry to make the life of Jesus Christ effectual upon our dark hearts and minds. It is he that shines the holy light of Heaven into our hearts and shows us the real danger that we are in as enemies of Almighty God. It is he that plants in us true and lively faith and incites heart felt repentance for those sins that we have committed against God and our neighbor. In a word, the Spirit is the very author of conversion. When he takes his place in the human heart he drives out all uncleanness. What was once the place of darkness and the worship of

the self has now become a Temple devoted to the worship of the Lord. For St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells within you?” And again, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

So then, how shall we live upon this Feast of Pentecost and all our life? We must first give thanks unto God for his great love that he has shown unto us for giving us, not only his Son, but also his Holy Spirit. For it was not enough that he send his Son to take upon himself our flesh and die upon the cross. It was not enough that he raise his Son from the dead, banishing the Devil, Death and the Grave. It was not enough that he glorify his Son with a name above every name and place him in authority at his right hand. Each of these, though majestic beyond all words, would have not been enough for our salvation. For we would have been like the man who inherited a king’s ransom. This magnificent inheritance had been set aside for him in a vault, locked away for safekeeping. Sadly, the key to the vault was lost and no one could find it. The man was powerless to open the vault

and enjoy his inheritance. For all intents and purposes, his condition after the news of his inheritance was identical to that before he heard the glad news. He was still penniless!

But our condition is not like this man, for we have been given the key and it is the Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote, this time to the Romans, “You have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” Because of the gift of the Spirit we are no longer outside the covenant of promise. We are not even servants in the household of God, as honorable a place as that might be. No, we have been made children of God, gracious inheritors with Christ himself, and citizens of the Celestial City. So let us offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to the Triune God for adopting us as children and giving us title to the joys of the New Creation.

But finally we must ask if we have the Spirit of God within us, or whether we still are the residence of the spirit of the flesh. Let us consider the evidence. Jesus told the crowds, “The good person out of

the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” And again he told his disciples, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” The Fifth Amendment states that we cannot be compelled to testify against ourselves. Yet it is the Spirit of God who plumbs the very depths of the human heart and lays them bare to the searching light of God. What evidence is there in our lives that we have become the residence of God the Holy Spirit? What fruit does our tree bear. When the master of the house comes will he find it loaded with fruit, or will it be bare and dry like the fig tree in Jesus’ parables? For the spirit of the flesh and this world produces the fruit of anger, lust and jealousy. These fruits tell of a tree whose roots have withered and the trunk is hollow. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The presence of these in our lives is testimony to the life-giving Spirit. By their presence we know that our roots are dug deep in God himself and that he is within us. Let us then pray to Almighty God that he would give his Spirit, even a double portion, that we may so glorify him in this life, that we may enjoy him forever in the life that is to come. AMEN.