

## **The Feast of Pentecost C (5/23/10 – Peace ... from the Helper ... through the Word)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

It is good that we have a day in the Church Year set aside to recognize the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. In Christendom in general, it seems there is considerable confusion and misunderstanding about the Third Person of the Trinity. The Father we can kind of understand. God has given us earthly fathers as a reflection ... tainted by sin though all earthly fathers are – which means that they are a poor reflection at best. Nevertheless, they give us an idea. The Son we can also understand. There are earthly children ... also tainted by sin. We are, therefore, likewise poor reflections of what it means to be a son (or daughter) of God. Still, we get the idea.

But the Holy Spirit – there is no earthly equivalent really. Maybe that is why there is so much misunderstanding and false information in the world about the spirit world ... and why we have things like the twisted worldly celebration of “All Hallows Eve.” And maybe that is why there is also so much misunderstanding about the Holy Spirit in the Church at large. We just don’t quite understand a Person Who is an unseen Spirit ... One Who is like the wind coming and going we know not precisely how or where – just that He’s been here in some mysterious ... sometimes seemingly ambiguous ... way (as Christ our Lord taught Nicodemus in that midnight theological discussion in JOHN chapter 3). And some people – having felt the powerful yet still-somehow-subtle work of the Holy Spirit to create, sustain, and strengthen faith in Christ – want to tap into such awesome and blessed power. They intend it for good; yet in their zealous misunderstanding, they “overplay” the Holy Spirit “trump card” ... and confuse His gracious work.

So we see and hear around us “Holy Ghost Revivals” ... and all sorts of supposedly “Pentecostal” – Pentecost style – congregations. Each claiming to have the Holy Spirit in some extra-pronounced and extra-blessed sense – and at least certainly more than we Lutherans have Him. Speaking in tongues ... ecstatic speech ... shaking and quaking and rolling in the aisles

... miraculous healings – these are the standard fare of those who claim to “really” have the Holy Spirit. Yet in my experience, these groups sadly miss the main – the real – work of the Holy Spirit ... and thus misunderstand Him as the Third Person of the Godhead.

The speaking in tongues on the *Day of Pentecost* was clearly a speaking in languages ... known languages – most specifically, languages known by those whom God the Holy Spirit had already gathered in Jerusalem. *Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.* [ACTS 2.7-11] In particular, those *mighty works of God* they were hearing about in their own native languages are about Jesus the Son of God and His perfect life and death and resurrection for the salvation of the world – as we shall hear when we continue in ACTS 2 next Sunday.

In fact, we can say that the Holy Spirit is **always** about pointing us to Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world. That is what Jesus Himself says the Holy Spirit will be doing when He sends Him. *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* [JOHN 14.26] We could understand that last part as: *He will teach you all things ... namely, He will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* As we heard Jesus say about the Holy Spirit on *The Fifth Sunday of Easter* from JOHN 16.14: *He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.* To be clearer still, in chapter 15[.26] Jesus declares: *But when the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me.* The Holy Spirit’s task is **not** to draw attention to Himself, but to point to Christ – even as Christ was continually speaking of and pointing to His

Father. So the Holy Spirit **always** points us to Christ ... and **His** work for our forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. That is how the Holy Spirit does His work of making us holy.

And how does the Holy Spirit do this work? What is His normal mode of operating? How should we expect Him to come and work in our midst? By the Word! Always by the Word! When in the verse immediately prior to our *Gospel* the other Judas – not the one who betrayed Jesus – asked Him: *Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?* Jesus responded with what we heard earlier: *If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him* [JN 14.22-23]. What the Holy Spirit will bring to the Apostles and **our** remembrance is the Word ... all that Christ has spoken – the Word Christ spoke while He walked the earth ... the Word Christ spoke through the Prophets in the Old Testament ... the Word Christ spoke through the Apostles and Evangelists in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit will come and work through the Word – both written and preached.

That is precisely what we see happening on *The Feast of Pentecost*. The Holy Spirit is working through the Word preached by the Apostles. *We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God*, those gathered from all over the world declare [ACTS 2.11]. That is, they were hearing about the work of God through the Christ in the Word proclaimed. *Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words*, Peter says as he begins to preach the Gospel starting with the Old Testament promise regarding that very day [ACTS 2.14]. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to bear witness to Christ and to create and sustain living faith in us.

So ... to ask the Scriptural question – which we Lutherans also often ask – *What does this mean?* [ACTS 2.12] What should we understand from all this for **our** Christian faith and life – today? Simply this:

When our own sinful pride causes us to try to build our own *Tower of*

*Babel* to reach up into heaven – whether we are building up ourselves in proud self-righteousness ... or building our own “kingdom” ... or making money, power, prestige, or any other created thing our “god” by devoting all of our thoughts and energy and loyalty to those things instead of the One True God – then God the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Word to bring us back down to the earthly reality ... to disperse our sinful thoughts. Then immediately – once He has worked knowledge of sin and repentance in us – He builds us back up as spiritual stones in that blessed and everlasting Temple of the Lord where Christ is the Chief Cornerstone through the Word of the Gospel. Or, to put it in the Words of our Lord: ***The Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in [Christ’s] Name ... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that [Christ has] said to you through His Holy Word [JN 14.26].***

It is through the Word – read, preached, and attached by God to His sacramental gifts – that the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, and sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith. So don’t forget God’s gifts of Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments. Do not neglect the gathering together with fellow believers around the gift of God’s Holy Word. Do not abandon your own daily devotion in God’s Word.

It matters not if things are going relatively well in your life or if everything is falling apart at the seams ... if you have your health or if you or a loved one is succumbing to the inevitable mortal decay and death. You always need the Word ... you always have the Word ... through which the Holy Spirit works in your life. And whenever you hear the Word ... whenever it comes to mind – remember that the Holy Spirit is there working ... and God has promised that His Word will not return to Him empty but will accomplish its good purpose [ISA 55.11] ... of bringing you to repentance ... working faith in you ... and granting you the Peace of Christ that soothes all troubled and fearful hearts.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]