

Holy Pentecost

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In the Gospel reading today, we heard how the Lord stood up on the great day of the Feast and cried out, “If anyone thirsts let him come to Me and drink! For out of he who believes in Me shall flow rivers of living water!”

These words led the people to a great division, some believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Prophet, and the Messiah, while others disbelieving and in their ignorance saying, “Will the Christ come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem?”

And still others, the officers who were sent by the Jews to take Jesus into bondage, were beginning to believe, and found themselves unable to take the Lord because as they said “No man has ever spoken like this Man!” And to this the Pharisees said, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”

Now this is a very interesting thing which the Pharisees said, “This crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” It is very interesting because on this day the Jews were celebrating the feast of the Law, the feast of Pentecost.

Now Pentecost as we have said before means “fiftieth”, and in Old Testament times the feast of Pentecost commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, which occurred on the fiftieth day after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea in deliverance from bondage to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

And so, each year the Jews celebrated Pentecost by recalling how God had separated them from all other peoples of the earth by giving them the Law of Moses which prepared them for entrance into the Promised Land.

It was over this Law, and specifically this Law in relation to Christ that there was a division amongst the people.

The Pharisees, who professed to be the keepers of the Law, argued vehemently against Christ because He did not keep the letter of the Law – in that he healed on the Sabbath. While the crowds who were beginning to believe in Jesus, were starting to understand what the Lord Himself had taught, that the Christ has come not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, and that if one truly believed in Moses then one would also believe in Him for Moses foretold His coming.

Now this division over the Law in relation to Christ continues to this day. And unfortunately, what also is true to this day is the saying of the Pharisees, that the crowd

which does not know the Law is accursed. However, ironic as it may be, it is not those who believe in Jesus Christ who are accursed because they not only know the Law and the fulfillment of the Law in Christ's teaching, but they also know the Giver of the Law – the God who appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. Rather it is the Jewish people who have cursed themselves by rejecting their own Messiah, the One who had come to infuse the letter of their law with the Holy Spirit.

And this of course is what we celebrate today, on Pentecost: the giving of the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul tells us that while in the Old Testament the Law of Moses was written in letters on stone tablets, in the New Testament the Law of God is inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the fleshly tablets of the heart of man.

While in the Old Testament the Law of Moses raised the Israelite people morally and spiritually head and shoulders above the rest of the nations, preparing them to enter into the Promised Land, in the New Testament the Law of Spirit raises the followers of Christ morally and spiritually above the corruption of this world, making them to fit to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In both cases, the Law was given by God to raise the moral and spiritual level of His people in preparation for what He was about to give them, or more precisely in preparation for where He was about to lead them – in the first case the Promised Land, in the second case, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now with the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost we know that God did not only give the Law of the Spirit – the law of love which governs His Heavenly Kingdom – but He also gave the power to fulfill that law, the power to become children of God.

Remember when the Lord ascended into heaven He told His disciples to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high, until the Holy Spirit would make His descent upon them, and then they would become witnesses to Him to all the ends of the world.

That is they would witness to everything which Christ had accomplished for their sake; proclaiming His divine teaching and miracles, His victory over sin, death, and the devil, and His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven in glory. And for the proclamation of this Good News, this Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire; fire because God is a consuming fire, and tongues because they were called to preach the Word of God.

But the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles for much more than just preaching, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles to incorporate them into the Life of Christ – to make them, and each and every one of us, sharers in Christ's victory and kingdom, adopted sons and daughters of His Heavenly Father.

It is by the Holy Spirit that we come to realize deep in our hearts that we are not children of this world but children of God – that our home, happiness, and our very life

itself are found no where else but in God and His Heavenly Kingdom. This exactly what St. Paul means when he tells us that the Holy Spirit continually makes unutterable groaning and petition on our behalf, crying out from within us to God, “Abba Father!”

And in a strange and mysterious way, by making this petition within us, the Holy Spirit inspires both gratitude and thanksgiving to God for all He has given us, but also dissatisfaction with ourselves for our present state of subjection to sin, death, and the devil.

And this dissatisfaction leads us, little by little, to leave the world behind in favor of heaven – to be crucified and dead to the world so that we might rise and ascend with Jesus Christ to His Father’s Kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has fulfilled the entire dispensation for our sake – He has overcome all obstacles to our entrance into Heaven – and He is even there now, at the right hand of the Father on High, preparing a place for us so that where He is we too might be.

And for this ascent to heaven, He has sent down His Holy Spirit upon us: first, to teach us how we must live in heaven by inscribing the law of love, the law of God’s Kingdom into our hearts; second, to give us the power to live by this love as Christ Himself lived by this love, and finally, the Holy Spirit was given to inspires us to leave the world that is subject to corruption and death behind in favor of this love, this eternal life, in God’s Heavenly Kingdom.

Let us therefore, on this Pentecost, be renewed in the Holy Spirit, by entering more fully and more perfectly into the new life which has been opened to us through Jesus Christ. For only in this way can we truly witness to the salvation offered by God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, and in His Holy Spirit.

And let us, like the Apostles on Whom the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire, proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of the Most-holy Trinity even unto the ends of the world. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!