

3rd Sunday of Pentecost

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

For the past two Sundays, those first two Sundays of Pentecost, we found ourselves celebrating the memory of the Saints, those men and women who typified for us what it is to be a Christian, what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

We looked at their lives, both externally and internally. We saw that they lived in different places and times, they had different professions, different callings in life – some were married, some celibate, and some monastic – some were wealthy and others were poor, some served the Church as clergy others served in lay capacities.

But what united all the Saints was their inner life for they all lived the life of the Spirit. In their minds and hearts they traveled the one straight and narrow path which leads to the kingdom of God. The path which Jesus Christ Himself traveled – the path of self-denial and the Cross – the path which leads through Golgotha to the mansions of the Father's Heavenly Kingdom.

We've seen how Jesus Christ not only inspired His disciples to follow Him on this path, but how He also gave His disciples the power to travel this most difficult road through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And we've seen how through this Holy Spirit the disciples not only shared in the life of Christ but also became an inspiration to countless others to make the journey to the Kingdom of God. And in so doing the Church of Christ grew from a small group of Palestinian Jews to a worldwide communion of men and women from every nation and place.

In remembering the Saints and their lives, these past two Sundays, we are reminded of a very important fact.

We are reminded that the life of the Christian is first and foremost a journey, a pilgrimage; a journey from earth to heaven and a pilgrimage from death to life. However, as we know, this journey, this pilgrimage, is not made physically by traveling from one place to another, but spiritually by making an ascent in our minds and hearts – by learning to think new thoughts and by learning to feel in new ways, by learning to acquire the mind of Christ and by learning to share in the love of God.

This inner journey, this spiritual pilgrimage, has been the life of the Christians from the very beginning. We know that in the earliest days of the Church, even before the followers of Jesus Christ were called Christians in Antioch, the faithful were first called the people of the Way.

In the Book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles, we see the life of the early Christians referred to numerous times as a way, or more specifically “the Way”— sometimes as the Way of God, other times as the Way of Salvation or the Way the Lord.

And this reveals to us one of the fundamental truths of our Faith, that being a Christian means traveling, it means movement, it means action. It means continually moving spiritually to higher ground, it means fighting the good fight, running the good race, learning new things, doing things differently, becoming wiser, acting more godly, and each day and at every moment seeking to draw closer to Christ and His Kingdom.

It is this movement towards God which we see in the lives of the Saints. And it is this movement towards God, and God’s movement towards us, which alone can build up the Body of Christ. Everything else we do – both personally and collectively – if it is not with the aim of drawing closer to God, it will not help us build up Christ’s Church.

It is really quite simple. If we don’t grow in our relationship with God, both personally and collectively, we cannot expect to be builders of His Church.

Think about it. Would the Church of Christ have spread from end to end of the world, if the Apostles hadn’t grown in their Faith? What if the Apostles been content with just making a few external changes to their lives, without really adopting all of Christ teachings, especially the most difficult ones, such as loving one’s enemies, or denying oneself taking up one’s cross and following Christ, without really changing their lives so they can draw closer to God?

Absolutely not, if the Apostles hadn’t themselves grown in the Faith, the Church would have grown either.

And for this reason, the Apostles, like us today, understood that for Christianity to be real for them, for the way of salvation to become their way, they each needed to actively change the way they thought about God, the world, and each other. They each needed to let the Holy Spirit transform their heart from an organ of self-love to an organ of love for God and their fellow man. They each needed to make changes in their lives, and especially those changes which they knew would be the hardest to make, so that they could share in the life of Christ, so that they could become more Christ like.

And this meant, taking what they had experienced together with Christ when He was in their midst – and He was in their midst whenever they gathered together in His Name, especially each Sunday for the study of the Scriptures and for the breaking of Bread – taking this experience of Christ from the Church and bringing into their homes, and into their daily lives – into the “real world”.

You see, the Apostles didn’t leave the Pentecostal experience in the Upper Room. They didn’t practice their Christianity only when they gathered together each Sunday. Rather they took what they experienced at these times and changed the rest lives to correspond with it. They made their homes into churches, places where they studied the Scriptures,

where they celebrated the liturgy, places where they prayed, fasted, and kept the commandments of Christ.

This “taking home” of the Church is what led Christianity to be called before anything else a way, the Way – the Way of salvation, the Way of God, the Way of the Lord. This is what allowed the Apostles to continually grow in their relationship with God, to continually travel along that path which leads to the Kingdom. They took what they experienced when they gathered together in Christ’s Name and based their whole life upon it.

When they were given an experience of enlightenment, when their hearts were warmed, when the Holy Spirit inspired them to truly lay aside all earthly cares, to forgive one another, to love one another, to give all they had for the benefit of the Church, they took this inspiration and they acted upon it. They turned divine inspiration into a way of life.

And the same must be said for each one of us Christians today. If we are to travel the Way of salvation, the Way of Jesus Christ, then we must take what we learn and experience in the Church and practice it in our lives. We must learn to live our Faith, not just in Church but in our homes and in our places of work, and on the street, and wherever we go.

And when we practice this Way, when we live this Faith, no matter where we are, the Way of Christ will once again be glorified and the Church of God will grow. It will grow because we will be growing in our relationship with God. And it will grow because people we will see that Christianity is not just some religion like the others with its own rules and doctrines but rather a way of life, and a way of life which leads to salvation, to union with God. People will see, what we ourselves are experiencing, that the Way of the Lord, the Way of Jesus Christ, leads to the Father’s Heavenly Kingdom.

To our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, be the glory together with His eternal Father and His All-holy, Good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!