

4th 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 we've spoken about what it means to be a Christian – what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ. And we said that being a Christian essentially means living our lives, whether we be in church, at home, or in the workplace, in such a way that we continually grow closer to God.

And this means being filled more and more each day with the presence of the Holy Spirit and being conformed more and more each day to the image of Jesus Christ – the One who has revealed to us not only the Heavenly Father but also what it means to be a authentic human being.

When we look at the lives of the Apostles and the first followers of Jesus Christ in the early Church, we see many things worthy of imitation, many things which we should try to incorporate in our own lives, both personally and as a mission community.

But if there is one thing which stands out to the reader of the Acts of the Apostles, that fascinating book which recounts the first days of our Church, it is the excitement and enthusiasm of the first Christians – an excitement and enthusiasm for the new way of life which had been given to them.

This new way of life is divine life, and it was first made manifest in the words and deeds of the Incarnate Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and then extended to all of mankind through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Now, what was so exciting about this way of life? Was it the admonition to pray, fast, and give alms? Was it the struggle of turning the other cheek, loving one's enemies, and bearing not only one's own cross but also the burdens of one's neighbor? Was it the thrill of being persecuted, tortured, exiled, or even put to death for this new faith?

No, it was not the struggle, difficulties, and challenges of living the Christian Faith which excited the early Christians – for these things are only the means to an end. What gave the first Christians such great excitement and enthusiasm was that through these struggles, difficulties, and challenges they were drawing closer to God, they were learning to live in a more god-like way, they were learning to become more Christ-like.

Through the life of the Cross, the followers of Jesus Christ were dying to the old ways of life, those ways characterized by sin and corruption – the ways of selfishness and pride, gluttony and lust, greed and tyranny, anger and hatred, gossip and rebelliousness – all those things which not only enslave man and bind him down to the earth, but also cause him to war with one another and even with God Himself.

The early Christians knew that through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, they could be freed from all the corruption inherent in the ways of sin, they could break the bonds which tied them to the earth. They could die to the old man and live to the new man – they could be refashioned and recreated – they could leave the bitter world behind and taste the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom above – a kingdom opened to them not just in the Age to come but even in this life.

And this taste of the heavenly kingdom, this experience of divine life, filled the early Christians with such excitement and enthusiasm for the way of the Lord, the way of the God, the way of salvation – that they could not keep this way a secret, that they had to share this Good News, this Gospel of Jesus Christ, with every person of the world.

What the early Christians experienced was the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. They experienced deep in their heart that desire to share the taste of heavenly life which they themselves had received, they experienced that call of the Lord to go into every nation baptizing in the Name of the Holy Trinity teaching those initiated into this new way of life, this divine life, how to observe everything which Jesus Christ had not only commanded but fulfilled.

The vast majority of the early Christians, like us here today, were not present on the Mount of Olives when the Lord gave this Great Commission, they did not hear with their ears the Lord's command to baptize and to teach. But like us today, the early Christians did hear this Great Commission, they did receive this call, for they heard the word of the Lord speaking to them through an organ more trusty and direct than the ear – they heard the word of the Lord speaking to them in their hearts.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is continually speaking His word to each and every one of us. He is continually whispering His divine inspiration, not just in our ears but in our hearts. He is continually telling us what it is that we must do to obtain our salvation, to make that clean break with sin and corruption so that we can taste the sweetness, peace, and joy of divine life.

If we heed this word of the Lord, if we act upon it, reforming our lives, little by little, day by day, our excitement and enthusiasm for our Christian faith will grow. And it will grow to the point where it spreads to our families, to our friends, and even to our enemies. The word of the Lord is very powerful, but for this power to be able to operate in our lives we must be willing to act upon it – to hear the call and to put it into practice. This is why the Lord says, blessed are those who not only hear the word, but keep it – that is put it into practice.

Let us think for a moment about the day of Pentecost. Remember, when the Holy Spirit descended on those gathered in the Upper Room, He manifested His presence through two things: through a mighty wind and through tongues as of fire.

The mighty wind reveals that the Spirit, Who blows where He wills, has the power to lift us up to the highest heaven, to carry us up above the smog of the sinful world, above the

corruption of this age, above our selfish passions and egotism, and to take us through the clouds into the light, peace, and fresh air of God's Kingdom.

Probably each of us can remember our first flight in an airplane, how we left the earth behind and shot up through the clouds into the clear and bright skies above. What an exciting and amazing feeling, a feeling unlike any other of this world.

It is this experience of breaking through to heaven which the Holy Spirit offers us each and every day of our lives – at each and every moment. All we have to do is be willing to leave the world of sin behind and to be taken up by the powerful gust of the Holy Spirit – to being willing to leave anger, pride, lust, greed, and all our passions behind in favor of peace, humility, love, and all the other virtues of divine life.

But to take that heavenly plane ride, to leave the things of sin behind, we need to hear the boarding call – we need to hear the call of the Lord. And this brings us to the tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit manifested Himself as tongues of fire because He had come to call us to the divine life of heaven. Just as the tongue speaks the word so too does the Holy Spirit speak the word of God, and He alone gives that invitation to fly, and not just the friendly skies, but the heavenly skies.

Brothers and sisters, if we heed this call, if each day we seek to break through the clouds of this life, each day we will experience something of the radiance, joy, and peace of God's kingdom. And when we come down from that heavenly plane ride we will be new people, people who have been refreshed, people who have glimpsed, even if it be just for a short while, the kingdom of Heaven, that kingdom to which our Lord ascended and is continually calling us.

And the joy and excitement we will feel from this taste of divine life will be the very same which the Apostles and first Christians felt – that joy and excitement which transforms itself into genuine enthusiasm for the Christian life, that enthusiasm which alone can lead others to leave the world behind and make the ascent through the Holy Spirit to that Kingdom above the smog of sin, that Kingdom of Heaven to which we are all called, that Kingdom which our Lord Jesus Christ is preparing for us.

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!