

John 14:23-31
The Festival of Pentecost
June 8, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, Jesus taught us to ‘send up’ our prayers to the Father “in my name;” today we hear Jesus promise that the Father ‘sends down’ the Holy Spirit “in my name.” Jesus is the true ladder upon which ascends and descends the communion between God and man. Or, as the Nicene Creed confesses regarding the Holy Spirit: “who proceeds from the Father *and the Son.*”

Indeed, the great exhortation of the ascending Christ for His apostles is “Remain in the city until you receive power from on high.” And that unique instruction to those who will be his witnesses has a ripple effect for all who will benefit and be His dear sheep.

Pentecost is part of the festival half of the year (which focuses on the life of *Christ*) because Pentecost is precisely an intentional part of Jesus’ mission for His Church. Consider it this

way: Didn't we say recently that Christ was, even on the morning of his resurrection, looking to his *ascension* ("Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father")? Then we ought also recognize how regularly this day of Pentecost – and, more broadly, Christ's sending of the Holy Spirit – how regularly that was anticipated:

What does John the Baptist say as he is pointing to the Lamb of God? "I baptize with water, but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit." And, listen to what Jesus says right before His ascension, as recorded by Luke in Acts 1: "[Wait for the promise of the Father which] you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

And, why can Jesus say "[Wait for the promise of the Father] you heard from me"? – because in the Upper Room in the hours before his crucifixion He spoke the words of our text: "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 commanded you"... so that Luke begins the book of Acts by saying that the risen Jesus "had given commands *through the Holy Spirit* to the apostles"... thus, bringing to their remembrance all He had given them as his witnesses unto Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth... just as He had said in that

Upper Room, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father... he will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

Indeed, so *much* did Christ anticipate sending the Helper, the Holy Spirit! – uniquely for his eyewitnesses (power from on high that the Word may go forth with saving efficacy!) and yet, with a ripple effect in the Spirit’s sacramental work for all the *life* of the Church, for every *generation* of the Church... as the Apostles’ Creed confesses, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church” (which is, the product of the work of the Holy Spirit).

So active is the Holy Spirit, quietly at work for the Gospel. So great is the promise... because so great is the need. Let’s not pass by that sad truth so quickly.

We openly admit our **need** in the first article of the creed, that the Father graciously created us (we *needed* him to do that!) and lovingly provides for and protects us (we need him to do *that!*)... and we shake our fists at him when we don’t think He provides and protects as promises. And we openly admit our **need** in the second article of the creed, that the Son graciously redeemed us (we *needed* him to do that!) and gave himself up for us all (we needed him to do *that!*)... and we wag our head at him

when we worry that His death isn't sufficient, and I need to contribute to my salvation through works or decisions or burning faith)... But, interestingly, we don't often openly admit or even meditate upon our **need** in the third article of the creed, that the Holy Spirit would graciously create faith and sustain it (We need him to do that!)... that, if it were left to me, I would *not* trust in God, I would *not* be confident in the atoning work of Jesus that effects the forgiveness of sins in daily life, and so I would *not* love my neighbor... I would be bitter about life. I would be judgmental against fellow Christians (parishioners, pastors, family members, friends). I would not be moved to repent, and I would not be moved to forgive. I would be cold and callous... because faith is not simply some cold, calculating head knowledge about the fact of the existence of God; faith is *hope* in God, *confidence* in His Christ, (yielding a heart quick to repent); faith then yields: *love* of my neighbor (including a heart quick to forgive), and *level-headed expectations* regarding daily life in the fallen world around me. We often assume those things come from within, from my own self-will and self-discipline, from my own understanding, my own life experience, my own knowledge of the Bible; we forget that they **cannot** be ours without the Holy Spirit being sent from the Father and the Son to make our bodies his temple.

And so, on the Day of Pentecost – “Repent and be baptized... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” Peter tells the crowd. Notice, the Scriptures do not promise the Spirit *through tongue-speaking* (in Acts, seen in various regions – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, among the Gentiles – as a one-time occurrence to visually testify to the spread of the Gospel to all nations and all peoples), but rather the Scriptures promise the Spirit to each and every one of us *through water and the Word*, as Jesus himself promised (John 3), “unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God”... but with the baptism of water and the Spirit, the baptized has the whole treasure of heaven, including the gift of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit may work upon him.

And continue to work upon him in the preaching of the Word – for He is the Spirit of *Truth* – and in the Sacrament of the Altar, for “he will bring to your remembrance” all Christ has given you.

So it is quite appropriate that the Nicene Creed confess the Holy Spirit to be “the Lord and giver of Life.” That was true of life at creation’s perfect beginning, when the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters and when God breathed into man the breath of life. It was equally true at creation’s redemption, as Jesus – in the hours of his Passion – speaks of the Helper’s work

which, in sacramental means, would later pour forth from the cross. It is equally true in creation's resurrection, as we see in Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, in which the Lord promises, "I will put My Spirit with you, and you shall live." And it is equally true in the new creation's eternal day, as the final words of Sacred Scripture teach us to long for: "The Spirit and the Bride (the Church) say, Come!' And let the one who hears' (faith through the Spirit at work in the Church) ... let the one who hears say, 'Come.' ... He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

And while we pray for Christ to come, the Spirit, the Helper, the Lord and Giver of Life, continues at work – joining together the many tongues, once scattered at Babel, now united on Pentecost... united in a common language that surpasses unity of *human* language, but in which each in his own human tongue confesses in the one divine language the one truth of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and all together crying "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

Or, as our sermon hymn cried out, "In holy faith Your Church unite." Isn't that the character of the one holy Christian and apostolic Church that reflects the unity of the Trinity? Did we not hear last week that Jesus specifically prayed that we would all

be united in him? And so – the only way for that to happen – we pray for the Holy Spirit to work upon us, as Christ has promised!

And when the Spirit works through Word and Sacraments – those are the instituted *tools* and *means* Christ has given – but for what *purpose*? What are the *fruits* of the Spirit at work? (You don't hear the Word and receive the Sacrament just for the sake of doing it, just to say that you did, or supposedly to earn credit before God. They are not specifically the *gifts themselves* or the *grace itself*, but are the means of grace)... so, what are the *fruits* of the Spirit at work? Or, what are the fruits of the Christian spirit, whose small-s spirit is vivified and strengthened by the capital-S Spirit. What did we say last week? What does it look like when Jesus answers our prayer, "In holy faith Your Church unite"? – first, repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Jesus promises in every Sacrament) and mutual reconciliation in the pure doctrine of Christ, that's the heart of our life together... and building upon that, *growing* from that (for a good tree begins to bear good fruit)... the fruits of the Spirit. How does Paul list them? "Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, self-control."

The world has not love, but is filled with hatred and ill-will, envy and disdain. The world has not joy, but is filled with anxiety and sorrow and despair. The world has not peace, but is filled with conflict and violence (or, as Jesus says, "My peace I give you.

Not as the *world* gives do I give.) And how *can* the world have such divine qualities when it has *not* the Holy Spirit?

But, note it well, where you harbor hatred and ill-will, envy and disdain... where your daily life is filled with anxiety and sorrow and despair... where your life knows conflict and even violence... then you see within Old Adam hard at work to resist the Spirit of Truth. Doesn't St Paul say the same when he says first of himself, "I see in my members another law waging war against [my inner being]" ... and then he says to the congregation,

"Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh... for while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a (sinfully) human way?"

There's our struggle, isn't it? The coming of the Holy Spirit is not about us being gifted a super-Christianity by which the Church lives perfectly immune from sin! Indeed, on this day of Pentecost, Christ grants the visible birth of the Church (if you will) through the coming of the Holy Spirit, *not* that we may be given power from on high to once and forever be free of our need for Christ, as if we can live holy and perfectly by ourselves and be our own God, but to once and forever be baptized into and daily cared for within the life of the Church by the ongoing behind-the-scenes work of the Holy Spirit, precisely that we may faithfully wrestle

against sin that dwells close within... for we are those *in* this world, but not *of* this world... And so, we wrestle.

The elders and I are now reading the book that some of us just finished in the book club – *The Battle of the Soul*; notice, not *The Battle **for** the Soul*, as if a wrestling unto salvation (That’s already ours!). But *The Battle **of** the Soul*, a wrestling of us *Christians*... we who live the baptismal life, daily drowning the Old Adam and the New Adam bearing the fruits of the Spirit... a life begun by Jesus sending the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, that (as the hymn prays) “we in living faith abide.”

Living faith abides among us, our hope *not* in the perfection of the Christian, but in the Spirit-filled life that feeds us the perfect Christ. Such is your joy, such is your comfort, such is the answer to your prayer in Jesus’ name... as the Helper is sent by the Father in Jesus’ name, and faithfully teaches us all things and brings to our remembrance all that Jesus gave us... for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +