



WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

PENTECOST SUNDAY

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“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who with the Father and the Son is to be worshipped and glorified...

Today is the Holy Spirit’s day, Pentecost, is a day full of grace and of favor. It’s the day our crucified, risen, and reigning Lord Jesus breathed power into His church - 120 believers gathered together in a room. Pentecost means “fifty” in Greek. In the Old Testament, it was the harvest festival of the winter wheat, fifty days after the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. In the rabbinic tradition, it celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai fifty days after the Exodus.

The Lord employs the symbolism of the day to its maximum effect. It was now fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus. Fifty days after Jesus’ “exodus” from death to life comes the outpouring of the Spirit. The “new Torah” given to the world that Gospel of Jesus Christ which is preached to the world in all of its languages. Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection from the grave, the first-fruits of the resurrection’s harvest is gathered - 3000 people heard the proclamation of salvation in the name of Jesus, they believed, and they were baptized.

Pentecost also indicates the beginning of the “last days,” the days leading up to the Last Day. Everything has been done for your salvation. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ has ascended to the throne of glory at the Father’s right hand. It is finished. Nothing more needs to be done except to broadcast the victory. Proclaim it. Preach it. Make it known far and wide. That takes breath. The Church must have breath if she is to proclaim the victory and reign of Christ. Before you can shout or sing - you need to inhale, take in a good deep breath. That’s Pentecost. The Spirit is the Church’s breath, the rushing wind and tongues of fire. That’s Jesus breathing the living Breath of God into the Church giving life and vitality and breath to speak.

The breath of God blew through the church like a mighty wind. Divided tongues of fire rested on each of the disciples gathered there. Wind and fire were Sinai signs. Jesus promised He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. They were all filled with the Spirit and began to speak in various languages and dialects. And the people who were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean world heard the good news of Jesus in their very own language and dialect. Pentecost is a miracle of both speaking and hearing. The Holy Spirit works both at the mouth and at the ear to convey the Word.

That’s why two people can get two different things from the same sermon, or react in two different ways. No two people hear the same sermon the same way. And sometimes what I plan to say and what is said are two different things as well. I believe, on the basis on Pentecost, that this is precisely how the Holy Spirit works. He always works through means, in this case words. Through nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, subjects and predicates - Human language. It is one of the most amazing gifts of the Spirit. The Word of God kills and makes alive, it tears down and builds up, it’s sharper than any two edged sword, yet it works through ordinary human language. It’s really no different than Baptism using ordinary water, or ordinary bread and wine being the Body and Blood of Christ. God works through means. Ordinary, humble, earthy means.

The languages spoken here were actual human languages. People heard the Gospel in their own native tongues. It was God’s way of saying “for you.” This death and life of Jesus, this Baptism, this forgiveness is “for you.” Take it personally and trust it. The words “for you” require a heart to believe.

Our Old Testament reading spoke of a different language event - the tower at Babel where God interrupted the ambitious plans of men to build a city and a tower to the heavens by confusing their languages. It's wonderfully simple and effective. If you want people to scatter, make it so they can't understand each other's subjects and predicates. Confuse their languages and the people will scatter.

It was a protective act of judgment, lest a united humanity would do something worse. It reveals God's mistrust of our false unity as sinners. You always hear talk about great it would be if the world was one had unity and a singular focus. The Lord doesn't appear to think that one world idea is something to which we should aspire. God knows the mischief that sinners will make if they "just all get together."

The place where God confused man's language was called Babel. It sounds like what it is - babbling. It forms the root for Babylon, the city that man builds, the city destined for final destruction on the last day. We are reminded, by way of this narrative, that the ambitions of man without God will result in nothing but confusion and chaos. All of our attempts to be united, to be "one people," will be nothing more than building a tower without the Lord. It also reminds us of who runs the verbs, if not the nouns. We don't, God does. We don't reach up to Him, neither with our towers reaching to the heavens or with our religions that attempt to do the same. God comes down to us. God becomes one with us and one of us. "The Word became Flesh."

At Pentecost, the confusion of Babel is not undone. The diversity of languages remains. Instead, God uses the diversity of tongues as a sign of His Spirit, and He brings people together not by giving them a common language but by giving them a common Savior. There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all. There is one Spirit, one bread, one cup. Our union in Christ is the true unity of the Church and the only way in which we can be united without our destroying one another in the process.

The world remains skeptical. Some thought the disciples were drunk at nine in the morning, though I've never met anyone whose language skills improved much less expanded with drinking. As the last days play out, the skepticism is bound to increase, as will false teaching and teachers, deceptive spirits and spiritualities, any distraction from Jesus and His cross. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy: "***Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.***" Our day is one of many spirits and many beliefs. It's a religious Babel out there, and sometimes that babbling confusion even creeps into our churches.

We ourselves are tempted as well. We have this itch for new things. We are fascinated by spiritual things. Some people expect the church to always be like its opening day, with wind and tongues of fire and speaking in languages and thousands baptized at one time. And that may indeed happen here and there where it's needed. But that's not the ordinary way. That's opening day.

The ordinary way of Pentecost is the preaching of Jesus. Baptism. Body and blood of Christ. Immediately after this episode in the book of Acts it says of those who were gathered, "***They continued in the doctrine of the apostles, in the fellowship, the Breaking of the Bread, and in the prayers.***" In other words, they worshipped together in much the same way that we do here. Preaching, teaching, fellowship in the Bread which is the Body of Christ and the cup that is His blood, and in prayer.

Can you imagine what would happen if wind and fire and tongues were part of every service every Sunday? We'd get bored with it within a month or two. We'd complain about the wind, we'd

worry that the tongues of fire were going to singe the carpet or our hair. And that chatter of all those languages. Couldn't we just settle on one?

Jesus knows this. He knows what is best for His Church. And He's promised always to be with us. The Spirit is how Jesus can both "go away" and "come to us." In one sense, Jesus "went away" when He ascended. He didn't go "somewhere" in the sense of place, but He withdraw His visible and touchable presence. We can't see Him as His disciples did, nor would we want to, not in His glory. But in another greater sense, He comes to us. He comes to us by the Spirit He sends, in the Spirit-ed Word that has Jesus' own declaration that the apostles who wrote did so guided by the Spirit who brought everything to their remembrance.

That same Spirit is at work here among us, subtly, humbly and hidden from our sight. Delivering to us the peace of Jesus. ***"Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*** That's the peace of sins forgiven. The peace of standing before God justified. The peace of having death conquered for you. The peace of eternal life and the promise of resurrection to life. That's the Pentecostal peace and joy given to you through the Holy Spirit. You have Jesus word on it. In the Jesus, Amen and Amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN!