

The Feast of Pentecost  
9 June, Anno Domini 2019  
St. John 14:23-31  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, Comforter, who causes the Word of Christ to be proclaimed for our salvation, stir up in us, who once received You in the waters of Holy Baptism, a fervent love of the Word of Christ and constant desire to hear and believe all that Jesus has spoken. Let our hearts not grow weary of hearing or cold to believing but instead may we find fresh joy and strength in the preaching of Christ and the Holy Sacraments. Rule in our hearts and minds so that our highest joy may be the Word of God and that our eyes may always be firmly fixed upon it. We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It always helps to have a little context and for some reason those who put the lectionary together decided not to at least include the question Jesus was answering. In verse 22 of John 14 we read “Judas (not Iscariot) said him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’”. And Judas asked this question because Jesus had said to His disciples “And he who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love Him and manifest Myself to him.”

Jesus’ answer to this question is of the utmost importance for any who wish to know Jesus, who desire to know the true character and work of God. The problem is that we don’t like the answer Jesus gives. It’s not satisfying to the flesh. And it’s definitely not satisfying to flesh which is deeply entrenched in the culture of experience and materialism, a culture of pseudo-science which rejects anything that can’t be replicated in a test tube or grown in a petri dish, a culture of I have to see it to believe it.

Jesus’ answer to Judas’ question lies in the preaching of Jesus and His brother apostles. Jesus is known always and only in His Word. As Jesus said “If anyone loves me, he will keep (better translated as “guard” or “keep his eyes fixed upon”) my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with Him.” Jesus doesn’t want you to look for special revelations or listen for voices. He definitely doesn’t want you looking down in your heart or waiting for visions or seeking Him in the beauty of a sunrise. To love Jesus is to love His Word, to love what He actually said, to keep our eyes fixed upon it, to read it, study it, learn it, and meditate upon day and night the psalmist says. The healings,

the miraculous feedings, even the raising of dead people - all that stuff was great but that's not where Jesus directs your attention. It is always to His Word.

Consider again what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples that day as they were gathered together. There were definitely some incredible displays taking place that Pentecost. There was the sound like that of a loud rushing wind. Then tongues of flame from heaven divided and settled on the disciples. It was a bizarre and maybe even terrifying few moments. And this is so often what we look for. We want proof. We want visible, measurable demonstrations that God is at work. We want God to send us clear, miraculous signs to show us the way because we think those are better and more reliable. We assume that the divine only wants to or only should operate in the fantastic and supernatural. Very often this is even how people choose a church. They look for the spectacular, visible manifestations that God is working - lots of people, lots of activities, lots of emotion, lots of happiness, lots of excitement. And many churches believe that if they could only jam some of the extraordinary into their worship then people will be drawn to them.

But Holy Scripture doesn't seem to indicate that either the rushing wind or the tongues of flame were the things that drew the multitudes. Never again in Scripture do we see these things happening. What does happen again and again and again? The preaching of Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners drawing people to faith in Christ. When the devout men from every nation under heaven gathered to the disciples that day they were amazed at the mighty works of God being proclaimed in their own language! It certainly wasn't the silly and useless nonsense babbling of those who claim to still receive the gift of speaking in tongues. These claim to have the Spirit but it is definitely not the Spirit of God because they aren't preaching Christ. Their speaking in tongues is nothing more than an arrogant show that benefits absolutely no one but themselves. They do not love the Word of God but themselves and empty demonstrations that they have somehow achieved a level of super spirituality that you haven't. It has nothing to do with Christ and Christ has nothing to do with it.

God is a speaking God. It has been that way from the beginning. God is known by what He says. It's how He reveals Himself to man. It's how He has provided that we can know Him. It is the Word of God, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ that gathers people and creates faith. Nothing else. It is the simple declarative Word of God "your sins are forgiven" that removes your sins as far from you as east is from west. It is the Word of God which strengthens and comforts God's children in the midst of their afflictions and trials and sorrows.

The ministry of Jesus was dominated by preaching - teaching man that he has rebelled against God, that he stands under God's strict judgment, and that we are completely unable to merit salvation or save ourselves; teaching us that He is a God of mercy who does not desire our damnation but that instead He has offered up His Son, Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It is only through this preaching and teaching that we are able to know that God applies the saving work of Christ to sinners through the washing of Holy Baptism. It is only through this preaching and teaching that we know that Jesus gives us His very Body and Blood in the Holy Communion for the forgiveness of our sins.

To love Jesus is to love His Word even if that Word is hard or contrary to reason. To love Jesus is to submit ourselves to His Word, to acknowledge our own wisdom and reason and desires to be filled with sin. You cannot know or love Jesus apart from His Word. He manifests Himself to you by His Word. He saves you by His Word. He teaches you by His Word. He forgives you by His Word. He makes known His will to you by His Word. He doesn't point you anywhere else so don't look anywhere else. It is by this word, which Jesus speaks from the Father, that the Holy Spirit saves you.

That's what Pentecost is about. It's really not about the Holy Spirit as though He needed to get His own special day too. It is the definitive demonstration that the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world is the will of God, that the work of Jesus continues through the witness of the apostles. It is God's demonstration that you are to give your attention to the preaching of Christ and that you can be certain that the preaching of Christ Jesus is God's will. You have been gathered here today by this preaching for the purpose of hearing this preaching so that by this preaching you may repent of your sins and receive the mercy of God which is in Christ Jesus. You have been called by the Gospel. You have been gathered by the Gospel. You have been enlightened by the Gospel. You have been sanctified by the Gospel. You will be kept by the Gospel. Apart from the Word of God none of these things ever takes place. Not because they can't but because God hasn't appointed any other way.

How glorious then that we have the Word of God so that we can truly know Him, believe in Him, and rightly confess Him! God didn't leave it up to your imagination. He doesn't require you to figure Him out or see Him by emptying your mind of all evil and thinking only pure and holy thoughts. He has plainly spoken to you because He wants you to know Him and all that He has done for you. He wants to be absolutely clear how it is that you are saved because He wants

you to be saved. He doesn't want you filled with doubt or chasing after empty things that can't save you. Hear again these beautiful words of St. Peter preached on Pentecost as those who heard his preaching believed what they heard, words which were given to him by the Holy Spirit and are therefore pure and true will of God: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

This is the sum and substance of the true work of the Holy Spirit - calling sinners to repentance and proclaiming to them the Lord Jesus Christ who bestows the salvation of His cross through the washing of Holy Baptism. Anything other than this is from the devil and will lead you away from Christ and back into judgment. You are not only encouraged but obligated to flee those who preach something else in Jesus' name, those who replace faith in Christ with fun and your own good works; those who deny Baptism to infants because they deny it's saving benefits; those who deny Christ the ability to join His Body and Blood to bread and wine to forgive you because that is beyond their ability to comprehend. Flee them because they are not sent by Christ and they are resisting the Holy Spirit. And do not stand quietly by while others are led astray by them. Speak up and speak the Word of Jesus and know that the Holy Spirit will be with you because speaking the Word of Jesus is His work.

True Christian preaching always and only points you to the Word of Jesus - the Word which He has caused to go forth to the ends of the earth, the Word which He has put in the mouths of His servants, the Word which He has promised fills the waters of Holy Baptism, the Word which He has promised fills the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the Word which you can pick up and read for yourself in Holy Scripture, the Word of salvation which He has caused to be proclaimed in your language today so that you may hear and believe and be saved.

How sad then when we who would be Christians set this Word aside as though it is not the living Word of God which bears with it the very Spirit of God Himself to make us alive, to raise us out of the death of sin. How sad when we don't make hearing and studying this Word the center and substance of our life and deny to ourselves and our children the working of the Holy Spirit so that we may be guarded in temptation, comforted in our trials and sufferings, and be given the truth to know and speak in a world filled with demonic lies. How sad when our homes are not filled with the Word of Christ being read and discussed and sung. We do not love the Word of Christ if hearing that Word is not our chief priority. We live

in God only by the Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. How can we say we love the Word of Christ if we refuse the opportunity to study it and talk about it with our brothers and sisters in Bible Class and refuse to help teach it to our children in Sunday School or keep them from it? Beloved saints of God, I fear the trend that is happening in our day when instead of the Word of God gathering us together it is being used as an excuse to separate ourselves more and more from the Body of Christ. God grant that it not be so among us. Rather may it be our highest joy to hear and to meditate together on the Word of our Lord which saves us so that we may enjoy all the blessings which come to us through His Word. If we desire to have our hearts and our minds and our lips filled with the Word of God, then first our ears must be filled. Then the Word will bear much fruit.

May God grant us daily His Holy Spirit so that we may be drawn to love and hear the Holy Word of Christ which saves us and that we may firmly believe it and live holy lives according to it.

In the Name of +Jesus.