

Pentecost
Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-31

Today we celebrate God give us His Holy Spirit. We read Acts 2:1-21, where we see the visible manifestation of God giving us His Holy Spirit, but in verses 37 through 39, we see that we receive the Holy Spirit as well:

“Now when [the Jews on Pentecost] heard [Peter’s sermon] they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘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.’”

To be baptized in the name of Jesus is to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Peter here is using “Jesus” as a way of saying God which includes all three persons of the Trinity. When they baptized these Jews they would have used the formula that Jesus gave them at the end of Matthew. When you were baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” you were baptized into Jesus. As Paul says, “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom 6:3) Paul here is saying that those baptized in the triune name of God are baptized into Christ Jesus.

The promise Peter is talking about is the gift of receiving God’s Holy Spirit. Everyone who is baptized receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. But this isn’t like some Christmas gift where you receive it as a possession. This is where God makes His home with you. And He does it through the Word combined with water. He continues to come to you when you hear the Word. That’s why we ask the Holy Spirit to come to us in many of our prayers. Whenever you hear or read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is active in you! So, you received the Holy Spirit when you were baptized, and you continue to receive Him whenever you hear or read God’s Word.

And you are the “far off” that Peter is talking about here. God chose one nation from all the nations that arose from the tower of Babel to give His Word and Spirit to. The Israelites were entrusted with God’s Word until the incarnate Word Himself came to fulfill all the promises of God. Now God chooses one nation, His church, from all the nations. The tower of Babel is reversed in this way: what was once the exclusive property of one nation now goes out to all nations and is no longer tied to one cultural group alone. You are Americans, to be sure, but, even

better, you are Christians. God chose you out of the nations to be His people and He put His Spirit in you.

So, what is the work of the Holy Spirit in you? There are many ways we could go about answering this question, but the third article of the Creed may be the best way to start to answer this question.

What is the third article?

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

First, you see here in the explanation of the third article the disturbing words, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.” No one is able to seek God on their own. We are so dead in our trespasses and sin that we cannot seek God. Paul says it this way: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rom 3:10-12) Jesus says it this way, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” (John 6:44)

One of the disturbing trends in Christendom is the idea that there are seekers out there. If they only knew what we had, they would want it. But Paul and Jesus are pretty clear: we cannot seek the one true God on our own. Unbelievers may know something is wrong. Or even that something is wrong with them. Or they may

know that there must be something more than this earthly life. Yet they cannot know Christ unless the Holy Spirit draws them through the Word. As Paul says, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?... Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom 10:14, 17) That’s why we focus on Jesus in our sermons and evangelism. People need Jesus and they can only come to Him if the Holy Spirit calls them through the power of the Word.

We also see in the explanation of the third article that the Holy Spirit does eight things: He 1) calls, 2) enlightens, 3) sanctifies, 4) keeps, 5) gathers, 6) forgives, 7) raises, and 8) gives eternal life. All of these He does through the Word. Let’s look at them.

First, the Holy Spirit calls. As we have just heard, the Holy Spirit calls through the Word. Jesus says in John 12, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.” (v. 32) Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (2:2) The Holy Spirit calls by showing us Christ and gives us the power to respond. In our Gospel reading today Jesus says, “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.” (John 14:26) As we heard three weeks ago Jesus says, “[The Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14) In this way all men and women and children are called to repent and believe the Gospel. The Holy Spirit empowers some to repent and believe.

Sometimes we get this backward and think we responded to God’s call through our own power. This is the decision theology that permeates 95% of praise music on the radio and in many churches. It’s very pervasive and completely deadly. Your old Adam wants some credit for believing in Jesus. Deep down, you want to believe there was something about you that was special and caused God to choose you! Consider well Paul’s warning to Gentile believers in Rome:

“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will

he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, *provided you continue* in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off." (Romans 11:17–22)

Second, the Holy Spirit enlightens. Christianity doesn't make sense to our reason or natural man. Salvation as pure gift based not on your merit but the merit of Christ doesn't make sense. According to Aristotle you become righteous by practicing righteousness. According to God, you become righteous by receiving a righteousness not your own. You must be enlightened by the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit working in you. And you are. Psalm 1 is a beautiful picture of how God's Word enlightens the Christian and what fruit it produces.

Third, the Holy Spirit sanctifies. To sanctify means to make holy. To be holy means that you have access to God your Father in heaven. The source of sanctification is the exact same as the source of justification: preaching, baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper. The school of sanctification is your life in the world. The Holy Spirit enlightens you not so that you may escape the world, but so that you might be salt and light in the world. As you act as salt and light in the world, you will be beat up by your sin, the devil, and the world. The Holy Spirit binds your wounds with His Word and Sacraments so that you are sanctified more and more. As you grow in your sanctification, you are more able to resist the temptations of your flesh, the world, and the devil. Although, you know, you are never immune to these temptations.

You aren't expected to live in the world without gifts. The Holy Spirit has gifted all of you with "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23) Too many focus on trying to obtain what is a gift. You already have these, albeit in different measures. As Paul says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7) Too often, and I especially include myself in this, we look to self-help instead of prayer. Too often, we look to striving instead of receiving from God. Too often, we measure ourselves against each other and you know what results you have with that: pride and despair. Let us live in the Spirit and enjoy each other. Use the gifts God the Holy Spirit has given you!

Fourth, the Holy Spirit keeps you in the faith. Paul describes the life of the Christian in Romans 7. It's a longer quote, but well worth hearing again:

"The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death

in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:12–25a)

You know from firsthand experience that the life of the Christian isn’t an easy one. God doesn’t kill your old man until you die. You must continue to struggle with him; and struggle you will. You have the new man whom the Holy Spirit created in you who hates sin. Sin is bondage, but you have been set free. Yet, your old man would have you enslaved again! You struggle continually. Until your grave. And the only answer to the struggle you face is Jesus! The Holy Spirit keeps you in the faith by working faith in you in the midst of your struggles through Word and Sacrament. Jesus comes to you in these gifts of grace and gives you rest and keeps you in the faith.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit gathers. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. There is no such thing as a Christian apart from the church *because* God has located His gifts of grace *in* the church. When a Christian leaves the church, his or her faith will die at some point because it’s not self-generated. And there is no such thing as “online” church. It is a mirage. God makes Christians to be together in one universal church. This is how Paul describes it:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part

of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-19, 27)

But you know the problem with this, right? People, even Christians, are ugly. This side of glory, the church will continue to struggle. It's always been this way. Sometime this week, read Revelation 2 and 3 which are Jesus' letters to the seven churches. It's hard work to be in a church together. Always has been and it will continue to be hard until our Lord comes again. But you are the body of Christ. Live like it!

Sixth, the Holy Spirit forgives. This is really the basis of everything else. Without forgiveness we cannot belong to Christ. Without forgiveness we cannot be empowered to good works. Without forgiveness we cannot be sustained in the faith. And this wonderful gift is received by faith alone. You will be tempted to return to works as the Galatians were, but don't fall into that trap. As Paul says, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3) So let us continue to live in the Spirit through faith!

Finally, seventh and eighth, the Holy Spirit raises and gives eternal life. This is the hope of the Christian. This is not some pie in the sky mentality, but certainty based on the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because He lives, you know that you too will live eternally with your Father in heaven. Because He lives, you know that every tear will be wiped away and sin and death and sorrow will be now more. So let me leave you with the words of Paul and John:

"Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Amen. Come Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)