

The Feast of Pentecost – 2020

Numbers 11:24-30

Acts 2:1-21

John 7:37-39

I was born in 1963. I grew up in the 60's and 70's and matured in the 80's. Like many of you, I have seen a great deal of societal strain over the course of my lifetime. The world can turn tumultuous in an instant. In 2004, the day after Christmas, a horrific tsunami killed a quarter of a million people. In 2001, Islamic terrorists changed our way of life. Some of our most promising and charismatic leaders have been assassinated, the massacre at Columbine High School has opened a floodgate of mass murder episodes, and we are presently in a crucible that will leave a pronounced scar upon the soul of many.

The coronavirus has infiltrated our society, bringing death and the fear of death. The ensuing lockdown has had an economic and psychological effect that has wrought its own type of havoc. Just as we are attempting to pull out of this crisis we have come face to face with a new and most unwelcome form of upheaval. Make no mistake, this is our society. Even the most buoyant personality is heavy laden by the events that are beginning to pile on. That is the context in which we gather here, in our courtyard, the courtyard of Christ the King, on Pentecost Day, 2020.

To celebrate what lies hidden beneath this day, to enjoy and treasure, to recognize and exult what lies present but hidden beneath this day requires something of you. What does it require? Discernment. A musical group popular in my youth asked a series of questions, calling upon the listener to evaluate their ability to discern. They asked: So, so you think you can tell heaven from hell? Blue skies from pain? Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail? A smile from a veil? The lyrics may have been a snarky jibe at those who had lost their ability to tell the difference between the pure and the defiled. You are a Christian and you are living in a troubled moment. Can you discern the reality of a broken creation and the God who invades this fallen world to give you His Holy Spirit, who invades this fallen world to recreate by His Son's death and resurrection? Do you see with the eyes of faith that God's work is no less pronounced, no less efficacious, no less dynamic in troubling moments than when rainbows are seen from sea to shining sea? Discernment. Odd as it may seem, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who opens the eyes of your heart to see the operation of the Holy Spirit precisely in times when we need to see Him the most.

Martin Luther had a line, a remark about the Holy Spirit which I want you to memorize today and take with you, a line which you do well to remind yourself of this week. It is simple. "The Holy Spirit is no sceptic." That's the line. Memorize it. Incorporate it into your mind, your heart, your perspective. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic. A sceptic is one who hedges, who hems and haws, one who sows seeds of uncertainty, calls into question the most obvious truths. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic. He makes assertions, declarations, He conveys truth and certainty. The Holy Spirit, whom God has caused to live in you, think of what the Lord and Giver of Life possesses and what He brings to bear on you.

At Creation, the Holy Spirit brooded over the waters as God's Word was unleashed. The Holy Spirit hovered over all that God brought forth on the first day as life erupted out of lifelessness. He was there with the Father and the Son as His eternal plan to give of Himself was realized – making man in His own image, the Son's image. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic. All the brilliance of the genesis of the universe is a part of His knowledge, His experience. The Holy Spirit knows eternity, He know the first day and He knows humanity – He knows you.

Just as He hovered over the waters at creation, the Holy Spirit hovered over Mary, He overshadowed Mary. On that great and glorious day, the Holy Spirit oversaw the conception of the Lord Christ. For redemption, for the salvation of the world, so that God might dwell with man and man might dwell in heaven – the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, gave new life to humanity. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic. He knows that event, He treasures that event, that divine movement – the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit asserts the veracity of that event to the world without condition. Conviction, Christian conviction comes the Holy Spirit and it is centered on the person of Christ. In the tumult of life lived out on this world, the Holy Spirit comes to convey to sinful man a reality that addresses the ills that face us, the ills that are in us. The Holy Spirit does not come to us with opinions or conjecture about who Christ is or what He has done but He comes to us with holy conviction to convey unyielding truth. Have you felt the unwavering certainty that Christ died for your sins? Have you celebrated with unequalled joy the wonder of the resurrection and what that means for us all? I know that you have. Where do you suppose that comes from? The Holy Spirit is no sceptic.

You are a sinner and you have been taught to pray that God would not take His Holy Spirit from you. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and restore a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit" (Psalm 51:10-12). You *know* what the loss of the Holy Spirit would do to you. Your eyes would be blind to the glory of God in the crucified flesh of Jesus Christ. Your heart would no longer burn to hear the wonder of God's love, expressed in His willingness to bear your sin and die your death. The grace of God would no longer inspire your love for Him and your fellow man. Your mouth would no longer hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ in His body and blood. You would no longer repent of your sin, you would live as a pig in the pigpen, indulging every wanton desire, putting no one really above yourself. What a horrible life! What a horrible and empty life! You have been redeemed from that. The Holy Spirit has brought you from death to life, converting you from unbelief to faith, washed you in Christ's blood and He directs your footsteps every day that your believing heart beats. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic and He lives in you. How blessed you are! How highly favored you are!

The Holy Spirit descended on our Lord at His baptism, marking His as God's anointed, the Christ. The Holy Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the desert where He fasted and endured the assault of the evil one, being tempted mercilessly by the father of lies. The Holy Spirit saw that victory, Christ's victory over Satan in the wilderness. The Spirit comes to you with that victory when you are tempted. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic for He knows what God the Son has done. The triumph of the cross; the Holy Spirit was active there (Hebrews 9:14). He takes what is Christ's and declares it to you (John 16:14). Victory. On Good Friday, that victory that was hard to discern. That bloody victory that was lost upon the eyes of sinful man. The world

seemed to be coming unglued. The sun refused to shine, the earth shook, men were calling good evil and calling evil good. But a centurion spoke what the eyes of his heart had seen. “Surely this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). No one can say that “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Different mouths, but the same Spirit – the centurion and you. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believed. That is you!

Discernment. The Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see what is hidden but present. The seal of Christ’s tomb has been shattered and life comes cascading out of His empty grave. He is risen. The Holy Spirit is no sceptic and the church confesses boldly what God has revealed – in season and out of season. We confess that the Holy Spirit is in the world to unite us to Christ when the world seems relatively calm and when cities burn with riots and a plague visits humanity. Discernment. You are called upon to see and bear witness to the work of the Spirit in our age. The church is His creation. The fire of His love is coming to bear on us. He makes our hearts His place of rest. We are the recipients of His remarkable fidelity to us – He consoles us, uplifts us, grants us courage and peace. Pentecost has come and we are greater for it. May we discern His work, the work of the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.