

Feast of Pentecost

4 June 2017

St. John's, Chicago, IL

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

Think about the builders of the Tower of Babel. This ego-centered lot was led by a motivation of defying God, and daring Him to flood the whole earth again. They felt they could survive it and outwit the Almighty. They waterproofed their magnificent structure with pitch. And there they were, building away with a challenge to the Almighty. They wanted this great achievement and the glory and fame that would come. But even more, unbelieving hearts wanted the satisfaction of out-smarting the Lord. "Don't focus your attention on God, but on us!" they would have cried.

The Lord responded by dividing up this proud, defiant, unbelieving multitude. He confused their language, so that they no longer had only one language, but many. With the difficulty in communicating, they abandoned the work project that celebrated co-existing with false belief, and went their various ways.

If you have ever purchased a piece of furniture from Ikea, you know the routine. You may be frustrated with the Curse of Babel. You come home, open the box, and find assorted pieces, and a plastic bag of hardware. But instead of written instructions for assembly, numbered pictures diagram how to bring the concept into a real piece of furniture. Instead of wasting dozens of more pages with each box, detailing in Swedish, German, Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, and a half dozen other languages, the work is communicated through pictures.

At Babel, God used language as an instrument of His Law, dealing a crushing blow to the multitudes that had rejected Him. Now, on the Day of Pentecost, He used language as an

instrument of His Gospel, opening the gates to entire peoples in the hearing of God's work of salvation!

The Holy Spirit takes what is Christ's and declares it to you. He uses the gift of language to deliver Jesus and His forgiveness. And Pentecost, He overturns the curse of Babel and uses language as His instrument to bring you His grace. He is perfectly happy to do the background work in giving and strengthening and sustaining your faith, as Christ Jesus saves you. Even though He is equal to God the Son, the Spirit would tell you **not** to focus your attention on Him, but on Christ alone.

Here we are. Ten days after the Ascension. Jesus had told the Eleven to wait in Jerusalem until He sent them the Gift that would come on this very day; the Holy Spirit Himself! He taught them a great deal about the Spirit, as He prayed and promised them on the night before He died. Now, it was finally coming to pass.

The children of God were receiving the Spirit of the Lord, and were prophesying, just as the Prophet Joel had foretold. Through this gift of speaking in languages they had never studied, the Lord was taking His Gospel, and spreading it to great numbers of people, very swiftly!

The Spirit was using this Word of God to breathe new life into vast armies of dry bones, as He took those who had languished, waiting for God to act throughout the centuries. Now, He had, and now, He resuscitated them, breathing life and immortality to them as a gift through Christ Jesus!

The Lord God provided this Feast of Pentecost in His Old Testament Church to anticipate this very day that the disciples were now experiencing. This harvest festival was 50 days after

Passover. Now, 50 days after the ultimate Passover, the Holy Spirit was harvesting thousands in faith for the Lord. No one could see Him or touch Him, but the Holy Spirit was and is working through God's means.

Pentecost would now be remembered for the event it had anticipated; this harvest of faithful, which the Lord reaped through the preaching of St. Peter and the others. Yes, it was the work of the Spirit, but He does not magically work by Himself. The Spirit gave words to Peter to preach. And He worked through the Baptism that washed some 3,000 people into God's kingdom that day.

There are many who would try to persuade you that the Spirit is working when you can feel it. That somehow your heart is burning, or you have some calming peace. Well, He may give you some reassurance like that, but He never promises it.

What He **does** promise is to work through the Means of Grace. He **will** work through every Baptism to deliver forgiveness, rescue, and salvation. He **will** attend the preaching of Christ's Gospel, so that the Word of God is spoken clearly and work through that Law and Gospel to bring forgiveness and life. He **will** be at that altar, bringing the body and blood of Christ Jesus to you, that you may eat and drink forgiveness, life, and salvation.

You fall into the same traps. You can end up talking about the Holy Spirit as if He is your imaginary friend. You grieve God when you look for this Spirit where He is not to be found. And you grieve Him when you pay too much attention to the Spirit, rather than Christ! Don't start looking for gifts that were not promised beyond the generation of the apostles. Nothing will come of that, except perhaps, the wasting away to dry bones, while you look away from the renewing and refreshing and reviving Word.

Christ is the perfect and ultimate Servant, the Suffering Servant, who has rescued you, from yourself, and the pains of hell that you were courting. And the Holy Spirit is the one who brings you into contact with your true and ultimate Lord, bringing you to be rescued.

Thanks be to God, who sends His Holy Spirit to deliver Jesus to you, that you may be His, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Amen.