

28 May 2023—Pentecost Sunday: Acts 2:1-21

Those in the crowd said, “...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed...but others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine” (Acts 2:11b-13). It was quite a ruckus; and as happens, bystanders insisted the commotion make sense to their cramped perspective and prejudices. Later in the passage Peter’s impromptu sermon results in 3000 people ...cut to the heart... (Acts 2:17ff.), converted and baptized. I hope at least some of those who sneered were among them.

The story of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is fantastic and riotous. Acts 1 is an indispensable prologue for Pentecost. Of Pentecost itself we hear just the beginning today—the first 21 verses of Acts 2—there are another 26 verses to the wild Pentecost story. Do you and I want to manage the story, explain, or explain away the Spirit’s presence and power, or do we want to live the story? If one lives in the Spirit, there are three signs.

Sign number one: life is Christocentric; that is, one’s life is centered on Christ. If you read the rest of Acts 2 you will see Peter’s address to the baffled crowd is centered on Christ, not on the Disciples. He quickly counters the charge of drunkenness, and briefly gives Biblical proof for the legitimacy of what took place. Then, to borrow Paul’s phrase, Peter proclaimed *Jesus Christ, and him crucified* (I Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). The Holy Spirit is not a promotional tool for individuals or the Church. The Holy Spirit shapes us so that Christ is the center of who we are, what we say, what we do, how we think.

Sign number two: the Holy Spirit gives us knowledge of God, others, and oneself. Before Pentecost the Disciples fearfully hid in ignorance; after they are knowledgeable and bold. Their former distress and panic are transformed into courage and commitment. The Holy Spirit brings knowledge of God fostering fearless commitment. We receive knowledge of others birthing compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. We receive knowledge of self—self-awareness, repentance, and amendment of life. We want to be worthy vessels of the Spirit’s gifts in others’ lives, to be of maximum service to God and others, especially those in need and necessity.

The third sign: through the power of the Holy Spirit, we actively prepare ourselves to receive yet more grace. In Acts chapter 1 Jesus’ followers were ready vessels: Acts 1:14: *(the 11) were constantly devoting themselves to prayer...* Through prayer and the fellowship of expectation, we anxiously yearn for the Holy Spirit to be at work in and through us. And we celebrate with joy all works of the Holy Spirit, in ourselves, others’ lives, in the world.

“Love grows by what it gives”—this is the economy of God’s grace: As Jesus states in Luke 6:38: *a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.* We grow in the Spirit by giving the Spirit’s gifts away.

Living in and through the Spirit is challenging. Troubles will come. Jesus will not take his followers out of the world but calls us to be lights in the world; Jesus will not make our lives trouble free; he makes us confidence-full, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, aflame with love for Christ, sharing the Father’s mercy. St. Seraphim (1754-1833) wrote: “Distribute the Holy Spirit’s gifts of grace to those in need of them, just as a lighted candle burning with earthly fire shines itself and lights other candles for the illumining of all other places, without diminishing its own light. For earthly riches decrease with distribution, but the more the heavenly riches of God’s grace are distributed, the more they increase in the one who shares them...when the Spirit of God comes down to mortals and overshadows them with the fullness of His inspiration, then the human soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God fills with joy whatever He touches.”

There are three signs of the Holy Spirit: 1) our lives are centered on and in Christ. 2) we are enlightened by the Spirit with knowledge of God, others, and self, issuing in courage, commitment, self-awareness, repentance, amendment, and the desire and actions to be of maximum service to God and others. 3) As we love so we grow by sharing the Spirit’s gifts with everyone and anyone. Flowing from all signs of the Holy Spirit is joy, the outward expression of God at work in us. The Holy Spirit at work in and through us, in and through others’ lives, compels us to joy.

Almighty and most merciful God, grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.