

Sermon May 24, 2015 - The Day of Pentecost,

Knowing the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1–21



Dear Friends in Christ

On this Day of Pentecost, we pray for the Holy Spirit to come and fill our hearts. But we also pray and gave thanks to God Almighty for He has “sent forth” His “Spirit to teach our hearts to know Jesus Christ... by faith.”

So today, the Spirit is everywhere, at all times leading us, holding us in his right hand (Psalm 139:7–12) and bringing about the new life that God has prepared even though we are in a decaying world.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians who do not have a right understanding of the Holy Spirit himself or about what he does for us. And the lack of knowledge can cause anxiety or even fear.

Thankfully, in the Readings for today, we learn what the gift the Spirit of God is and does for each of us and for us as a congregation.

So as we observe Pentecost today, let ask ourselves how well we know the Holy and Spirit. After all we do believe in the triune God, therefore should truly appreciate, without fear, the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in us, we shouldn't fear the direction and what He wants us to do a well.

The three thousand believers on the first Pentecost day didn't fear what they were witnessing, and neither should we.

I. We might not know very much about the Holy Spirit and therefore may fear him.

It is true some of us don't know much about what the Holy Spirit does. We know a great deal about the Father and the Son, but not much about the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, the Spirit is called the “unknown member of the Trinity.”

Many Christians today are somewhat like that small group of isolated Christians whom Paul found in Ephesus and asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). Likewise, many Christians simply do not know much about the Holy Spirit and understand His role in their faith and life.

The very name of “Spirit” or “Ghost” as we still say, suggests something eerie and spooky.

It is hard to think of the presence of the Holy Spirit here and with us, especially when we reject the idea of ghosts or spirits and apparitions, for we are not a culture that believes in superstitions, no we are a modern culture. Unfortunately we transfer the same idea to the Holy Spirit. We think of him more as some kind of Holy—maybe, but still—Ghost a Spirit, and we want more the visible as well.

Now add to that what the ways certain people act and speak when they claim to be under the influence of the Spirit. We can all see on TV such services where people are screaming, waving their hands, or passing out. We fear that the Spirit might cause us to act in these strange ways.

Out of such false fear, we at times may wish to ignore the Spirit or downplay his significance in our lives. Ignoring the Spirit would be tragic, because the Church needs the Holy Spirit as much today as it did on that first Pentecost. Each of us needs his power and work in our lives.

II. But the Spirit doesn't work in strange or embarrassing ways.

Therefore knowing what the Holy Spirit is crucial and beneficial for each one of us. Our appreciation for His work will grow, so will our faith as well. But will continue inspiring us also to be a congregation of a different level. As congregation there are some aspects that we need to consider as look at what the Holy Spirit has been doing in the Church even from day one.

The book of Acts will help us to see what the Holy Spirit is doing since that Pentecost Sunday. The work He did then is the same even today. Dr. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts tells us that on that first Pentecost, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4–6).

The disciples, when they were filled with the Spirit, were not babbling incoherently. They were speaking sensibly in recognizable languages. The Holy Spirit did not cause them to lose control or to hop about, they were vehemently speaking about Christ though, and that cause a stir among the execrators. The Holy Spirit filled them with courage, conviction, and joy, empowering these formerly fearful men to stand up and tell the crowds about Jesus—to announce that Jesus, whom they had killed, was risen and forgave them unto eternal life. Three thousand heard, believed, and were baptized.

The Holy Spirit does the same thing for us today. We don't have to be afraid he'll cause us to weep uncontrollably, babble incoherently, or lose bodily control, but will help us to come out of our comfort zone and testify to the Gospel.

Emotionalism isn't the work of the Spirit. The Spirit won't embarrass us or cause us to do something silly or obnoxious. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is simply to tell people about Jesus. Talks about Jesus. Tells us, tells others through us about Jesus.

III. The Spirit instead comes to us today through Word and Sacrament and leads the Church to saving faith and changed lives.

You have probably heard Christian people how God has change their lives. What a difference God has made in their lives. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith in Jesus and an understanding of all that he's done for us. Jesus has died for our sins, risen from the grave, and now lives eternally. He loves us, forgives us our sins, and has prepared an eternal home for us in heaven. But were it not for the work of the Spirit, we would not believe, be saved, or see heaven. It is then because of the Holy Spirit that we do receive all kinds of blessings from God, yes even regeneration to a new life.

If we ignore the Spirit by staying away from God's Word and Sacraments, there's a harmful progressive effect. We not only weaken our own faith, but we also weaken our churches. We shouldn't therefore, ignore but invite the Spirit into our hearts, homes, and churches. We should allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in us, individually and congregationally by learning more about the Spirit and His works.

In the same chapter two of the Book of Acts, Luke describes a few characteristics of a congregation where the Holy Spirit is present and working.

First, Luke says, is that the Spirit-filled church is dedicated to the study of God's Word. Luke wrote, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (2:42). These early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles', or biblical, teaching—the Word about Jesus' saving work. This was a learning and studying community, not just devotional lifestyle, or like reading a self-help book, this was a serious reading and studying of God's Word. People of God today should likewise be in the Word. Each Christian needs to study the Word alone and in the company of other Christians.

The second mark of the Spirit-filled church mentioned in Acts 2 is fellowship. Our word "fellowship" translates the Greek word *koinōnia*, based on the word for common. What we share in common is our faith in the one true and triune God. We have the same God as our Father, the same Jesus as our Savior, and the same Spirit as our Teacher and Comforter, and that becomes practical, because faith, our common faith brings us together in mutual concern and care for one another.

The third mark of the Spirit's presence is worship. The early believers were devoted "to the breaking of bread [that is, the Lord's Supper] and the prayers" (2:42). The spirit-filled church is a worshiping, praying church. I picture that in worship, the people smiled, sang out, listened attentively, and participated actively, and yes they were new to what they were doing. I wonder how they did that, because they were not used to it, yet wholeheartedly they worship and eager to learn a new of way of life, the life being Christians, and were able to, because they had the Holy Spirit, they did not resist Him, instead welcomed Him. They were happy to be there to hear the Word and receive the Sacraments.

A final mark of the Spirit's presence in that Acts 2 early church was evangelism, or outreach. Acts 2:47: "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Since God desires all people to be saved, we are commanded to go into all the world with the Gospel message. The Spirit empowers us for witness, and what is more prepares the way as He leads us. Yes, when actively wanting and desiring to share the message, first the Holy Spirit has moved you to do so, and then giving you opportunities as well. But when we don't want to or desire to share the Gospel, obviously nothing happens. And even when after sharing the message there we might not have a large number of conversations, but there is always at least one, who will hear you and who will hear the Gospel and be brought to life, a life in Christ.

A story, meet my friend Andy....

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Today you and I don't have to be afraid of the Holy Spirit, of the Holy Ghost. He will not embarrass us or cause us to do anything outrageous or shocking. Rather, he will lead us to Christ and to a life that will be in God's ways, learning and practicing a healthy teaching or doctrine—that is the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection—to loving fellowship, to authentic worship, and to compassionate outreach.

We pray for the Spirit to come to us now and make us into that kind of a Christian and that kind of a church.

Amen.