

Pentecost

On Pentecost, the fiftieth day since Jesus rose from the dead, God publicly poured out his Holy Spirit on his disciples. With fiery tongues, they boldly spoke in various languages so that the visiting worshipers in Jerusalem could hear the gospel in their own tongues. And what were they hearing? They were hearing about the wonderful works of God. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He teaches. He teaches what God has done for the salvation of sinners. This is the purpose of the Scriptures. St. Paul calls them inspired. Literally, he calls them God-breathed or God-spirited. In other words, all Scripture is given by the Holy Spirit. As St. Peter says in his second epistle, holy men wrote as they were directed by the Holy Spirit. When Paul says that the Scriptures are breathed out by God, he also describes their use and benefit. He writes:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, showing what is wrong, correcting, and training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)

In another place, Paul summarizes these purposes of the God-breathed Scriptures by saying that the Bible gives us patience, comfort, and hope (Rom 15:4). And this is why Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Comfort includes more than just soothing words. It also includes instruction, guidance, even rebuke when necessary. And it's all comforting, because at the heart of it all is the peace, which God has established for us in Christ. At the heart of it all is that God is favorable toward us, that he doesn't count our sins against us, that he has saved poor sinners from condemnation, and that he desires to dwell with us and in us forever. So even when we are being corrected, even when what the Bible says is difficult for us to hear, the Holy Spirit is working through this Word to give us peace in Christ. He is teaching us everything we need to know as we live under our Lord Jesus in his kingdom, serving him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

This is how the Holy Spirit works. He works through his Word. The two main teachings of the Word of God are the law and the gospel. The law is the love God requires of us. Love God with your whole heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. The law teaches great wisdom. If you follow the law, then you will see the benefit of it. You'll spare yourself of unnecessary heartache. But the law won't give you the peace you need in your conscience. It will dangle the peace in front of you, promising that you will attain it if you only achieve and fulfill what it demands. But in doing this it only drives you to the terror of hell. The gospel is the good news that Christ, true God in the flesh, has died for you, has taken away your sins, has risen from the dead, and has gone to the Father with your salvation completely secured. This is what creates faith. The law demands faith in the form of obedience, but it can't give it. Only the gospel gives faith. Only the gospel causes you to rely on God's grace and find peace in your conscience.

And yet, both the law and the gospel are spoken by the Spirit. St. Paul says that the law is spiritual. It cuts deep into the bone and marrow, revealing the darkness of our hearts. But the Holy Spirit's primary word is the gospel. His primary work is to comfort and strengthen us with the assurance that God is with us, that God is for us, that God sees us as righteous through his Son Jesus Christ. The law and the gospel are infinitely far apart when it comes to the source of our comfort. And yet, when the Holy Spirit applies these two great teachings to us, they are as close

as skin is to our bodies. The Holy Spirit intimately, skillfully, and lovingly applies his Word to us. In other words, he teaches us. He gives us patience. He encourages us.

Consider the sermon St. Peter preached on Pentecost. He ended his sermon by telling the Jews that this Jesus whom they crucified has been raised from the dead and has been declared by the Father to be true Lord and Christ. These words cut them to the heart. The preaching of the crucifixion by itself is the greatest preaching of the law, because it shows the full extent of God's wrath against sin. There in the crucified Christ is God's anger poured out on all sinners. "You crucified him," Peter said. This is what we all must hear. We all must make confession. We all must see how our own sin put Jesus on the cross. Yet, hidden under this terrible declaration, which cuts us to the heart, is the great comfort given by the Holy Spirit. It is that Jesus is Lord and Christ. He has returned to the Father who has begotten him from all eternity. By his cross, by his death, by his shed blood, he has established peace with God for all sinners. This is how the Word of God works. It changes our mind. It gives us repentance. Not only does it pierce our hearts to show us how much we have fallen short. But through the good news of salvation, it gives us peace to believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. This is true repentance. It is not only sorrow over sin. It is also the confidence that God forgives. "Repent," Peter said to them, "and all of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Peter was teaching them. The Holy Spirit was teaching them. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He teaches through the Word.

Those who don't want to be taught cannot claim to have the Holy Spirit. They cannot claim to know and love Jesus. It's easy to say you love Jesus when you get to define for yourself what love is. By the decree of an ungodly politician, this month of June is set aside by unbelievers to celebrate sexual perversion in defiance of him who created them male and female. They claim they are being loving and accepting. But the Word of God condemns this as sin. And Jesus says that if you love him then you will keep his Word. I recall some years ago a couple of visitors came to church and told me they disagreed with closed communion. They asserted that Jesus would never turn anyone away. I tried to tell them what the Word of God says about agreement in the teachings of Scripture and that taking communion is a public confession of agreement. Now, it would have been one thing if they still had some misgivings about the practice and yet humbled themselves to consider what the Bible actually taught. After all, the Scriptures are patient. But they didn't want to hear it at all. They didn't want to be taught what the Word of God says. Jesus certainly does not turn away anyone who is burdened by the guilt of his sin. He says, "Come to me all who labor and carrying a heavy load, and I will give you rest."

But the Word of God is not to be treated as a plaything, as if we can pick and choose what we like and then ignore the rest. To do this is to mock the Holy Spirit. God's Word says that he resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. He listens to the cries of those who are cut to the heart, and he doesn't turn away anyone who humbly learns his Word. But to those who think they know enough already, he certainly does turn them away. The Word of God isn't something we have pegged and figured out so that we don't have to learn it anymore. No, it is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. The Holy Spirit continually applies both law and gospel, both

rebuke as well as encouragement, chastisement and comfort. Those who feel no need for this are lying when they say that they love Jesus.

The peace Jesus gives to us is not the peace the world gives. The peace the world gives is given by the devil, whom Jesus calls the ruler of this world. The devil lets the world have peace as long as they are not listening and learning from God's Word. And he doesn't care how left-wing or right-wing they are. Certainly, the leftist maniacs who push for disgusting abominations such as abortion, sexual immorality, and other kinds of wickedness should be easy to spot. But the devil is just as successful, if not more, when he can use morally upright people to push his cause. He will use the empty preaching of tolerance and compassion to deceive Christians into mistaking worldly perversions for Christ's mercy. But he'll also use seemingly wholesome messages of God and country to deceive Christians into mistaking rugged individualism for faith in Christ.

Worldly peace will promise a comfortable life. And if you prefer a more conservative, traditional, and straight-laced version of it, then you can certainly have it. You can talk about hard work, family values, and all sorts of virtues, which we certainly should talk about and instill in our children. But you know that feeling you get when someone blurts out God's Word, and it feels kind of awkward, out of place, and cringe-worthy? You know that urge to walk away, zone out, or change the subject when someone starts talking about what Christ teaches? I'm sure many of us are familiar with it. Even the most devoted Christians experience it from time to time. What is that feeling? What is that urge? It's the devil. It's the wicked spirit who tries to have a claim on you, who promises you comfort and peace as long as you keep the Word of Christ out of it. He'll let you talk about Jesus just as long as you don't get into what his Word actually teaches about sin, about God's judgment, about his cross, death, and resurrection, about living a Christian life and the hope of the resurrection.

But that wicked spirit doesn't have any claim on Jesus. Sure, he'll try to use Jesus' name to support every godless action you can think of. He'll use Christ's name as a slogan so long as he can keep you from learning and growing in what Christ actually teaches. But no matter how much he uses the name of our Lord, he has no claim on him. Instead, Jesus came to do what the Father commanded him. He came to fulfill the Word of God for us. This is therefore what the Holy Spirit teaches us.

So do you know that feeling when you realize how weak and sinful you are, how unworthy you are, how much you need to learn? It's truly humbling to see that this world's peace never lasts, and you find that your only refuge is in Christ. It hurts, and yet, it's also profound peace and comfort. What is it? It's God. St. Peter calls it God's heavy hand pressing down on us (1 Pet 5:6). And Jesus says that when we hold onto his Word, he and his Father come to us and dwell with us. His Spirit who lives within us is constantly fighting against our sinful desires. So even while we experience the devil's deceitful attacks, the Holy Spirit assures us in his Word that our peace is found in the blood and righteousness of Christ.

God gives us days of outward peace, and we thank him for this. But the peace, which Jesus gives, is deeper and stronger, standing firm in the midst of trials and hardships. Soon after this magnificent day of Pentecost, the disciples were beaten and mistreated for preaching in the name of Jesus. But they rejoiced, because they knew they were sharing in the sufferings of their

Lord. So they asked that God would give them boldness to confess it all the more. This is how the Holy Spirit comforts us. In the heat of afflictions, he gives us the fire of boldness, opening our lips and loosening our tongues to confess his holy Word. Through the patience and comfort of the Holy Scriptures, he gives us hope in what God has prepared for us in Christ. This is the peace our Lord has left for us as we wait for his appearing.

In Jesus I find rest and peace.
The world is full of sorrow.
His wounds are my abiding place.
Let the unknown tomorrow
Bring what it may; there I can stay.
My faith finds all I need today.
I will not trouble borrow. Amen.