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The Day of Pentecost (Series B)

May 24, 2015

Text: Acts 2:1–21

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday, I asked a question. “How has the Church survived all these years? Almost 2,000 years since the Day of Pentecost.” The answer I gave was “Jesus prays for His Church.” That answer was based in large part on John 17, that beautiful and power high priestly prayer offered up by Jesus to His Father just a few hours before our Lord was betrayed, arrested, and eventually, crucified. One of the petitions Jesus prays is found in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Jesus prays that His Church would be a sanctified group of believers, set apart from the sins and evils and unbelief of this world and dedicated wholly and completely to Him.

Last Sunday, Jesus we saw that Jesus prayed for His Church. And in His prayer we live. But there's something incomplete about my answer to the question, “How has the Church survived all these years?”. To be sure, Jesus prays for His Church. And the end result is that the Church survives because Jesus prays for His beloved Bride, His sanctified Church. But how is that prayer answered? That's today's message!!

Pentecost! The coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus prays for His Church, that she might be sanctified in truth. In John 15: 26 (today's gospel reading), Jesus says, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” To be sanctified, that is, set apart for all eternity in the truth of the Lord Jesus, means to be filled with, guided by, made alive through the on-going presence of the Holy Spirit. I will send to you the Spirit of truth says Jesus. The Church survives because Jesus prays for her; the means by which the prayer is answered is the Holy Spirit.. The Church survives because she is filled with the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayer of our Lord that she be sanctified in truth for all eternity. (*Repeat*)

Pentecost! Fifty days after Easter, the Lord begins answering His prayer by sending the Holy Spirit. Those 50 days before Pentecost can be divided into two different time segments. The first segment is the 40 days leading up to our Lord's ascension. During that time, the resurrected Lord Jesus was with His disciples presenting “himself alive

to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Think of this time as an intensive, short-course in pastoral theology. On the fortieth day, the Lord ascends into heaven to rule and reign over all heaven and earth from the right hand of God the Father almighty.

The second segment is the 10 days leading up to Pentecost. The disciples went into an “upper room” in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13) and they waited in prayer. For ten days they waited for the promise of the Father when they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Think of this time as God’s holy remnant gathered in prayer and worship as she waits to see God’s saving actions. During this waiting, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, comes. And what a coming it is!

The upper room is filled with a sudden, mighty wind and tongues of fire are seen resting upon each of the disciples, all 120 of them. And all them begin to speak in unknown tongues, languages as the Spirit gave them the ability (Acts 2:1–4). Wind, fire, and words. Those are the supernatural events associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit, who comes in answer to our Lord’s prayer that the Church be sanctified in the truth.

In answer to Jesus’ prayer, the Holy Spirit comes to the Church and fills her with His eternal life. In the Nicene Creed, we describe the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and giver of life.” The Holy Spirit gives Christ’s Church resurrection life. In John 16:14, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit “will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Everything that belongs to Jesus, the Holy Spirit brings to us. Eternal life, the Spirit brings that. Forgiveness of sins, a clean conscience, joy, peace, love, endurance, patience, self-control, the ability to resist and overcome temptations, the desire to love God and serve Him in truth and fervency, the hope of eternity, you name it and the Holy Spirit brings it.

The Holy Spirit brings everything that belongs to Jesus. And Jesus says in John 16:15, “All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he (i.e., Holy Spirit) will take what is mine (and also the Father’s) and declare it to you.” Stop and consider that. Everything that Jesus gives to us comes from the Father. All spiritual gifts. All virtues. All good things. Every present and eternal blessing comes from the Father. Jesus says those things also belong to Him. And the Holy Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and then declares them to us; He gives them to us according to His grace, love,

and wisdom. Everything given to you is a Trinitarian gift from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Wow! That's absolutely amazing.

Pick a gift. Let's pick something as basic as your body. You know your height, weight, the color of your hair and eyes, etc. That body is given to you from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Does that change how you think of yourself? I hope so. Pick your family with all their quirks, idiosyncrasies, habits, etc. Those family members are given to you from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. You can do this with everything. Your employment, money, homes, government, this time in history in which we live, etc. Everything we receive is a Trinitarian gift.

The Church survives because Jesus prays. That prayer was offered to the Father by the Son and is answered in the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost is the beginning of the answer to our Lord's high priestly prayer. Our Lord's prayer for His Church continues to be answered as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost, wind, fire, and words formed the supernatural signs indicating that the Holy Spirit had breathed eternal life into Christ's Church. Those signs were one-time indicators; they are not repeated nor should we expect them to be. The Holy Spirit is given, never to be taken away. The 3rd Person of the Holy Trinity is working to answer Jesus' prayer by taking what belongs to Jesus and giving those gifts to us. It all began on Pentecost. And will continue until the Lord Jesus continues.

The trouble that so many Christians have, especially in our day, is that we want supernatural signs of wind, fire, and words as if they were the gifts that Jesus wants to give. They are the signs, the markers pointing to the beginning of something which continues for all eternity.

Let's look at it like this. Acts 2:41 says that on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls were added to the Church. How were they added? Did the wind, fire, or words (in this case, the words I'm referring to are those unknown languages and tongues spoken miraculously by the original 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 2:4 and described more fully in vs. 6–11) create saving faith in those 3,000? Absolutely not. In fact, vs. 12, says that the crowd was "amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" Others, who were less generous, declared the whole business to be a drunken mess. Vs. 13, "But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

The new wine was the cheap stuff generally used for the purpose of getting drunk quick.

So as far as the growth of the Church was concerned, the miraculous signs of wind, fire, and words/tongues led to confusion and mockery. As a former member of the Pentecostal movement, I can't help but shake my head and wonder, "What was I thinking?" I was looking for Christ's promised gifts in all the wrong ways and places even though it was right in front on me.

The Church was created, grew (by 3,000 on that first day), and continues to grow to this very day through the preaching of God's Word and the baptizing of those who hear and believe. Look at what Peter does in vs. 14ff. He preaches a sermon about the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus! His Scripture text is Joel 2:28–32. Those who heard and believed were baptized. Listen to Acts 2:41, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." The Holy Spirit answers Jesus' prayer to sanctify the Church through preaching and baptism.

And if that isn't enough Biblical proof, Acts 2:42 describes what the Church did from the Day of Pentecost onward, "And they (i.e., 3,120 believers) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Ask any of my confirmed catechism kids about the 4-fold structure of Biblical worship. And they should tell you: 1) preaching (apostles' teaching), 2) offerings (i.e., fellowship), 3) Lord's Supper (i.e, break of bread), and 4) prayer. This is where we seek God's gifts; not in signs of wind, fire, and tongues but in Word and Sacrament worship!

Jesus prays for His Church to be sanctified in truth. The way that prayer is answered, and it most certainly is answered, is by the coming of the Holy Spirit who takes everything that belongs to the Father and the Son and gives it to us by means of His God's Word. In answer to Jesus' prayer, you all are filled with the Holy Spirit who gives you Jesus, the Father, and all his present and eternal gifts. Rejoice in them, dear saints of God.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.