

Pentecost Exordium

In Leviticus 23, the LORD instituted the liturgical calendar of sabbaths and feasts for Israel. The Passover, I assume, we know a bit about since it is directly linked to Good Friday, the day of our Lord's crucifixion for the redemption of the world.

Then comes a feast day we are probably not as familiar with, but was tied to the Passover, The Feast of Firstfruits.

This was the day after the Sabbath after Passover, so it would always be on a Sunday.

It was to be observed by taking the first sheaf of grain that was reaped (hence: firstfruits), and the high priest would present it before the Lord at the altar as a wave offering.

After this ceremony, then the full harvest could begin.

This was the divinely instituted way to begin their harvest with the Lord's blessing.

Then on the first day of the 8th week, they would begin to celebrate the Feast of Weeks.

This was a thanksgiving festival, the conclusion of the first harvest of their liturgical/agricultural year.

The fields that had been white to harvest were gathered in and the firstfruits of it were given to the Lord for the work of the temple and the appointed sacrifices.

So the year Christ was crucified, He died the day of the Passover (Friday), rested in the tomb on the Sabbath (Saturday),

and as the priests were ceremonially reaping the first sheaf to be waved before the Lord (Sunday AM), the women & the disciples were learning about **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**, as word of Jesus' resurrection began to spread among them. ^{1Corinthians15:20}

And today, we celebrate the 8th Week, the Feast of Weeks

also known as Pentecost (for the 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits).

On this day, as the Pentecost pilgrims were bringing in their harvests' firstfruits,

the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles with the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire.

There He gave them the gift to speak in languages that they had not learned

so that He might reap the harvest of the faithful and devout believers from around the world,

as St. Paul describes the elect: **God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved,**

through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ^{2Thessalonians2:13}

This Sunday also goes by another name in the northern climates, like in England: Whitsunday. ^(White Sunday)

It was so named because among the ancient Church, Easter Vigil and Pentecost

were the days that were highlighted for Baptisms, and the practice was

that the candidates for Baptism would put on new, white garments

as a reminder of the perfect robe of Jesus' righteousness that they received through Baptism.

So today, we celebrate Whitsunday, as we will/have receive(d) little Tessa [Browning] in Baptism.

We celebrate the Holy Spirit's work of gathering the sheaves, white for harvest.

Here, we confess the Spirit's work, in *calling, gathering, enlightening and sanctifying... and keeping the Church with Jesus Christ in the one true faith, until at the last day He will raise up us and all the dead, and will grant us and all believers in Christ eternal life..*

Rise and join me in singing our Exordium hymn: #399 - O Light of God's Most Wondrous Love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Peter addressed the Pentecost pilgrims,] "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it....

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Dearly beloved,

Imagine being there that day. Put yourself in the assembly listening to Peter's first sermon.

How do you think you would have reacted?

It was a zinger of a sermon. He pulled no punches.

He came right out and said, "**this Jesus... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**"

He put the blame squarely on them.

Sure, there were intermediaries, the High Priests and the elders of the Jews condemned Him and sent Him off to Pilate, who unjustly gave them their verdict, but that did not alleviate any of them of their part in Jesus' death.

Numerous people had been followers of Jesus but secretly "**for fear of the Jews.**" John 7:13; 19:38

No one stood up for Jesus' defense. Everyone abandoned Him.

The people, though convinced that He was at least a true prophet by **the mighty works of God**, could not hide behind the cloak of innocence before the omniscient Judge.

And not only was this Jesus crucified, but He is risen from the dead.

And He isn't just a man, but He is Lord and the Christ that they had been waiting for for so long.

And THEY killed Him, just 8 weeks ago.

Their reaction is recorded for us, **they were cut to the heart**, asking, "**Brothers, what shall we do?**"

Peter's answer is startling. I doubt it was what the crowd was expecting to hear.

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ

for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

That was it? **Repent and be baptized** into this same Jesus they they were guilty of crucifying?

This same Jesus would forgive them through that baptism? that simple washing?

AND He would gift them with the Holy Spirit and all the gifts that He brings?

Yes! Yes! And, indeed, YES!

That was it. Receive. Receive. Receive.

Repent. That is, RECEIVE the word of judgment that God should pass upon you for your sin.

Let it break you down and humble you to confess that you are sinful by nature and unclean...

Repent. And RECEIVE the word of God's grace that Jesus has taken your judgment upon Himself.

And be baptized. Notice: it is not in the active tense, but it is passively RECEIVED.

You do not wash your sins away, but the Father forgives your sins.

You do not give yourself the faith to believe in Jesus' work of redemption,
but the Holy Spirit pours out upon you that gift.

And demonstrating how passive we are in these promised gifts of Baptism,

St. Peter adds, **For the promise is for you and for your children.**

The infants, as well as the older ones, were to be baptized.

He didn't give an age limit, so why should we hinder the children from RECEIVING these gifts.

Even those who can't make decisions for themselves are called to RECEIVE faith and forgiveness
in Christ through Baptism.

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Is it a hard message to hear that YOU killed Jesus, the Christ?

We don't want to take the blame. You weren't there. You didn't give your approval.

You didn't even ask for Jesus to come and die for you... But He did anyway. And that is good.

In fact, all that happened to Jesus, all the evil and injustice and abandonment, and more...
none of that was by accident or outside of the Father's control.

St. Peter said that Jesus was **delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.**

This was the plan all along. That He would suffer and die for you... on account of your sins.

And what sins are these? All of them.

But consider especially the times when, in fear, you have secretly kept your faith to yourself.

The times when God's name was blasphemed and you did not stand up to defend Him.

The times when you abandoned Him, went your own way in order to save your own skin.

So when we hear from Peter, "**this Jesus... you crucified and killed**",
we, like that Pentecost assembly are just as guilty.

And it is good, right and salutary that with them, we can own our sin and let it rest on Jesus.

We cannot justify ourselves by acting as if we were innocent of Jesus' blood.

So, **cut to the heart**, we can confess this truth along with those 3,000 people.

And along with them, we can receive Peter's word, or more correctly, the Lord's Word thru Peter.

And we can rejoice in and cherish our Baptism as the impartation and sealing of God's forgiveness.

And along with those 3,000 and the many who came after them, we continue **to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching**, that is hearing, reading, marking and inwardly digesting the Scriptures,
and the fellowship, that is, being gathered by the Spirit on the Lord's Day with our fellow saints,
to the breaking of bread, that is, RECEIVING our crucified and risen Lord's body and blood,
in the Holy Communion.

and the prayers, that is the prayers of the Divine Service where we regularly pray
to RECEIVE our Father's forgiveness and mercy, both for ourselves and on behalf of others,
and where we regularly respond to His forgiveness and mercy with prayers of thanksgiving as we
rejoice in the peace that Jesus has left for and gives to us. It is certainly not as the world gives.

So I guess you don't have to imagine being there at the first Christian Pentecost.
The Spirit has just preached the same sermon to you through St. Peter's words
and by His grace works the same response: a desire to be free of that blood guilt for Jesus' death,
and to receive that same Jesus in Word and Sacrament for your forgiveness and salvation.

In Jesus name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria