

## In Nomine Iesu

### Pentecost: the Festival of God the Holy Spirit 2022 Subject and Lighting – John 14:23-31

#### Exordium

Jesus promised His disciples that after He ascended into heaven He would send them the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Today, the third great festival day of the Triune God, following as it does Christmas and Easter, we confess that our Lord fulfilled His promise so sent the Helper; and we glorify God the Holy Spirit, the Helper sent from heaven to open the eyes of our faith to see the Savior, who is the Light of the world, the Light to enlighten the Gentiles and the Glory of His people Israel. Let us rise and confess this truth, **singing ELH 399!**

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, I am going away and coming back to you. If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Remember when you sat in the photographer’s studio for a professional portrait of your son or daughter, perhaps on a first birthday? You remember how it was done. The photographer positioned the baby just so, adjusted the lighting so it was just right, and then started taking pictures, as you, mom and dad, smiled and interacted with your child to get a good picture. And it was good, wasn’t it? It probably still hangs on your wall at home. The camera was focused perfectly and the lighting positioned just right. The photographer, though unseen – and you probably don’t even remember his or her name! – just made it happen. So it is with the Helper, the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the portrait of the Savior that the Spirit breathed into the hearts and minds of the apostles.

#### I

The Holy Spirit has been called the shy member of the Holy Trinity. Shy, because He is not the focus. He is the one who focuses. Some years ago, the Charismatic Movement became prominent, claiming that the Holy Spirit had been neglected. This, they proclaimed, was the reason for the weakness in the so-called “mainline” denominations. The Charismatics encouraged people to leave such churches and

instead join them, who emphasized the person of the Holy Spirit in their worship. So, mainline denominations declined in number, charismatics increased, and at the same time created a new weakness. Because they emphasized the very opposite of what Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do when He was sent. The Holy Spirit does not focus God's people on Himself, but on the Son sent from the Father to suffer, die, and rise from death. You see, the Holy Spirit is like the photographer who directs his lighting at, and focuses his camera on, the subject. He portrays Jesus, so that people can see Him for the Redeemer and Savior that He truly is.

Consider hymn 402, v. 1: "Holy Ghost with light divine shine upon this heart of mine; chase the shades of night away; turn the darkness into day; v. 2: Let me see my Savior's face, let me all His beauties trace; show those glorious truths to me which are only known to Thee." The Spirit focuses on Jesus. His is the portrait reflected back to us in God's Word that enters our hearts and minds through our eyes and ears. The Spirit sheds His light on us through that word so that we may see the picture the Bible's words paint for us, the portrait of Christ our Savior.

God's Word and Spirit are together. You can't have one without the other. That is why our Lutheran Confessions make this point: "In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one His Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before ... Accordingly, we should and must maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and sacraments. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from the Word and sacraments is of the devil." (SA III:VIII, 3/9)

We see the same point in today's Gospel. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, "the Helper," whom the Father will send in His name. He tells us how those who love Him will keep His Word. To keep Jesus' word means to hang on to what Jesus' says. That is how the Holy Spirit teaches us. He does not bubble up inside of us as just a warm emotion. He does not give us some special, secret insight into the hidden plans and purposes of God. No, the Spirit works exactly as Jesus said: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (v. 26)

## II

To keep His Word is to love Jesus. But to keep Jesus' Word doesn't mean to obey certain rules and regulations as if Christianity were a matter of human will rather than of God-given, Spirit-created faith. When people understand the Christian life primarily in terms of obeying rules, they will end up either self-righteous like the Pharisees of Jesus' day or despairing when life does not turn out as they hoped. In the face of disappointment or tragedy, such a person says, "Why did this happen to me? I went to church. I gave my offerings. I said my prayers. I was good to my neighbors. I did what God told me to do. I played the game of life according to His rules. God has not been fair with me." When one begins to think this way the law of God that we thought we were obeying slaps us in the face with the harsh verdict: "You didn't do enough." Dear believers in Christ, we never measure up to God's law. His law always finds our works lacking. There is no comfort or consolation in the law. We will never find shelter from evil in our obedience to God. And sin will not leave us alone. It will pursue us.

Now, do not misunderstand. The law of God is good. And the more and better we keep God's law the better life will tend to go for us. But ultimately we will fail. It is the nature of sin, the sin that around us, before us, and, yes, even in us.

Keeping Jesus' word is not about our obedience to the law. To keep Jesus' word is to **hold on for dear life to the forgiveness of sins** He bestows on us in the Gospel. It is to rely on the fact that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners by His keeping the law for us, His shedding of His blood to take away the judgment of the law on us. To keep Jesus' word is to let nothing in life or at death, no affliction or suffering, no joy or pleasure, tear from our hearts the promise that the crucified and risen Son of God was given to us to redeem us. That is the faith the Spirit implants, cultivates, nourishes, and strengthens as we meditate on Jesus' words. That is the truth that the shy member of the Trinity reveals **as He focuses His glorious light on Jesus Christ** the crucified and arisen.

To shine the light of the Spirit on Jesus is the purpose of the Divine Service. The same Holy Spirit who breathed the gift of new birth into us in the waters of Holy Baptism, comes to us here and now in the liturgy and in the preaching of the word of God, telling us that we have as our very own just what the words declare to us, that we are the children of God. We have a loving Father who gave His own Son into death for us. **We learn to love Him who first loved us.** "If anyone loves Me, My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." How deeply God makes His home with us we know from the Lord's Supper. For here Christ gives us His own body and blood to eat and to drink. His flesh, born of Mary, and nailed to the cross as the atonement for the world's sins, is given us to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of sins. Here He renews us in soul and body, preparing us for the adoption that is to come fully on the last day when, as we learned from the Catechism, "He will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

The Spirit is not given once only, but over and over again. Wherever our Lord's words sound out clear and plain, there is the Holy Spirit who sheds the light of grace and truth in this world's darkness. The gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift of Jesus Himself, who gives us the peace that the world cannot know, the peace that passes understanding. The Spirit does not just drop in once and awhile. He is not here today, gone tomorrow. He does give us a spiritual high that fades and then leaves us empty once more. No, He comes continuously in Jesus' words spoken to us in the absolution and sermon, in Baptism and in the Sacrament. These are His gifts. When we receive these gifts in faith we have peace. Not as the world gives. No, He gives the peace so dearly won for us with the blood of Christ.

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In word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit's brightness drives away darkness from our hearts and minds, so that we see by faith what Thomas saw: the crucified and risen Savior. This is the peace the Spirit brings, the peace that the world cannot take from us. For this reason Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (v. 27) Let this portrait be hung, dear friends, not just on a wall in your home, but in the secret recesses of your heart. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**