

In Nomine Iesu

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EXORDIUM

Of the three major festivals of the Christian church year, Pentecost is by far the least celebrated. Not only the lack of interest in this festival, but also in general, it seems that the Holy Spirit does not get His fair share of attention among the Persons of God. The Father is emphasized as Creator, whose Son obeyed His will. Jesus of course gets a great deal of attention as the God-Man who redeemed the world of sin. But what about the Holy Spirit? Shouldn't we spend more time studying His work?

We probably should, but I can assure you that the Holy Spirit is not jealous of the Father and the Son. And He does not require recognition to continue to carry out His work. If God's work depended in any way on our proper acknowledgement, He would stop doing His work. But the greatest acts of God are often the things that are most overlooked and ignored. God the Father continues to preserve and operate creation by His mighty Word—operations that we take entirely for granted. God the Son shed His own holy blood for all sinners. The non-Christian part of the world rejects Him, and most of the Christian part acts like He didn't do enough.

And all the Holy Spirit does is rescue souls from eternal hellfire. If He were not at work through Word and Sacraments, no sinner would believe. *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except [by] the Holy Spirit" (1Cor. 12:3)*. Therefore we give thanks today for His work, work that He will continue to do for us out of love even when He is not acknowledged. But today, in praise of His work, let us rise to sing hymn #399 – "O Light of God's Most Wondrous Love."

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God of all peace and consolation, who gloriously fulfilled the great promise of the Gospel by sending down Your Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to establish the Church as the home of His continual presence and power among men, mercifully grant unto us, we humbly ask You, this same gift of Your Spirit, to renew, enlighten, refresh, and sanctify us, to be over us and around us like the light and the dew of heaven, and to be in us evermore as a well of water springing up into everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 129)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

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 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.” (NKJV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose work of redemption was and is declared throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, dear fellow redeemed:

It all started with an idea. “What if we...” “No one has ever done something like this before...” “This will make us famous!” While some made bricks out of clay, others began to stack them together. The footprint of a great tower started to take shape. It was a testament to the ingenuity and strength of mankind. Perhaps this tower could even put them in contact with the God of the heavens. But they did not have to go up to God; He came down to them. He came to see the tower and the surrounding city that were being built. He was not pleased. It was not that they were constructing the tower in the wrong way. He was not there to give architectural advice. He visited them because they were ignoring His Word.

After the waters of the Flood had subsided, the LORD told Noah and his sons, *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”* (Gen. 9:1). He wanted the population of humankind to increase again, and He wanted them to spread over all the earth. Instead, the descendants of Noah migrated to a place in the land of Shinar and settled there as a community. The LORD identified the problem, *“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them”* (11:6). The LORD knew that a sinful people united would forget about Him and worship themselves. Therefore He confused their language and dispersed the people *“over the face of all the earth”* (v. 8). This confusion of languages, which persists to this day, is the reason that tower was never completed, and why that place became known as Babel.

I

The problem with the Tower of Babel was not in its construction but in its purpose. It may have been built well, but it was intended for the glory of man and not of God. The old Adam of every sinner is skilled at putting on a good show and drawing the focus away from the Creator. Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of being *“like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness”* (Mt. 23:27). The Lord is not concerned how pretty and well put together we look to the world. He cares about the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. *“For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart”* (1Sam. 16:7).

What He desires to find in your heart is faith, trust in His Word. Jesus said in today's text, *"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"* (v. 23). God wants to take up residence in you. But how can that be? How could you ever be a home fit for God? Some sinners think that building a proper home for God within themselves depends on them. They "give their life to Jesus" and "open their heart to Him." They promise to live according to His Commandments and never go back to their old sinful habits. But this amounts to trying to climb up to God—like the people of Babel—instead of God reaching down to save. And what happens? The sinful habits return. Progress is not made. The building of self-constructed righteousness falls apart, as each of us knows by experience.

The idea that I must by my own power produce the righteousness God requires, is building on the wrong foundation. The Lord does demand our perfection, this is true. But we cannot manufacture this righteousness. The foundation for a solid spiritual building is Jesus. The Apostle Paul writes, *"For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1Cor. 3:11). But Paul seems to contradict himself when he says in another place that we are *"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets"* (Eph. 2:20). Of course, *"the apostles and prophets"* refers to God's holy Word which points in every place to Jesus. Paul adds that Jesus is *"the cornerstone."* He sets the lines upon which the building is built. It stands or falls by Him.

Sinful human thinking sees this as great foolishness. All unbelievers are born and live in Babel making their grand plans. The world quickly discards Jesus, in the same way that a farmer might chuck an unwanted stone in the rock pile. But ironically, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"* (Ps. 118:22). Whether or not the world accepts it, it is true. Salvation cannot come by self-determination or social activism. Salvation comes alone by faith in Jesus Christ.

So Jesus is the foundation and cornerstone, and you are supposed to be built up into a fitting residence for Him. How does that building look? Does the structure look good on the outside but is completely rotted and falling apart on the inside? Or do you hide your faith behind a weak, external appearance because you don't want to draw any attention to your beliefs? Do you try to ignore the places where damage has been done by sin? Are you actively trying to patch the cracks where the cold wind of temptation rushes in?

II

We have not done such a good job at keeping our spiritual house in order. But God excels at construction and repair. If He sees water damage in the ceiling, He knows where the problem started. If the walls are crumbling, He knows how to make them strong again. This work of diagnosing and fixing is the work of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that *"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). The Holy Spirit knows how to build up. He starts with the Law, getting us to see how we really are. We recognize that we are really the worst kind of materials. How could the Holy Spirit build something meaningful with us?

But He does. He chips away the defects and smooths out the rough edges. He plans our purpose in the house of God, carving out a unique function for each of us. And after the Holy Spirit constructs our faith through the Word, then He fits us together with other believers, side

by side, piece by piece, until something beautiful rises up from the rubble of the world. What reaches to the heavens is a spiritual building for the glory of God. As Ephesians 2:20-22 says, you are *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

The Holy Spirit Makes You a Home Fit for God. That is the special work the Holy Spirit was sent to do after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He was sent to the disciples on Pentecost and enabled them to speak the languages of people both near and far. On Pentecost, the confusion of tongues at Babel—a judgment of God against sin—was removed. God wanted every nation to hear the Good News that there is salvation, forgiveness, and life for sinners.

And now this message has come to your nation and to your ears. God did not make a mistake when He chose you to be baptized and believe. And it is no mistake that you are now hearing His Word. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon you through this Word. A tongue of fire might not appear above your head. You might not suddenly speak in a different language. But you do have your sins forgiven and your faith strengthened.

Whenever you take to heart God’s Law and Gospel, the Holy Spirit is active there doing His convicting and comforting and sanctifying work. Since the construction work depends entirely on Him, you can have every confidence that your building will not topple. Therefore by faith in Jesus, you always remain a welcome home for Him.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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