

SERMON 938

Pentecost Sunday

May 24, 2015

999th Week as Priest

826th Week at St Dunstan's

91st Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Sometimes you can't see the thing that is right there in front of your face. I'm not talking about your cell phone, although I lose mine in plain sight often enough. Keys are something else that I seem to misplace or overlook, but that's not it either. Fortunately, I can't forget my glasses, because I can't see anything without them. However, I do feel that my other senses—smell, taste, feel, and hearing—are in a way heightened because of my impaired vision. I can find my way in the dark better than most, and I have a very keen sense of smell.

But what I'm referring to is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity—what is commonly called the Holy Spirit, and back in the day was often called the Holy Ghost, and is sometimes known as the Comforter, the Advocate, and

even the Paraclete, a word in both Latin and Greek that means “intercessor” or “helper.”

We talk about God the Father very often, and we seem to have a comfortable view of God in this way. He looks like somebody’s grandfather. He has a white beard and sits on a golden throne. God the Father is surrounded by angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Isn’t that more or less right?

We speak of Jesus, the Son of God, or God the Son, perhaps even more. Jesus is God made Man. We know that he was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and came to Jerusalem. We know that he was crucified, died, and was buried—and that he was raised by God and ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

But seldom do we direct our attention, or our conversation, to the Holy Spirit. And I wonder why that is, and perhaps you do as well.

For several weeks, we have been studying the Catechism, An Outline of the Faith, in our “Confirmation & Coffee” meeting at 9:30 in the Little House. Well, this Catechism gives us help in knowing what the Church says about the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a “Who,” not a “What,” according to our Outline of the Faith. The Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, all in caps, “God at work in the world and in the Church even now.” This is fascinating news! The Spirit is among us and with us, constantly, always, and everywhere.

But how do know this to be true? Because it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow as Christians. That’s interesting. It sounds as if “getting saved” isn’t all that we are supposed to do. Not even close. And as if we could “get ourselves saved” anyway. No, the Spirit comes to us in several essential ways. One is by confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. (And that *does* sound like “getting saved.”) The second way is by “being in love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.” And a third way comes to us when we read the Holy Scriptures, when we worship together, and when we pray together. We are “inspired,” which means literally to be “in the Spirit.”

When the Day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a mighty wind. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit. Martin Bell, a

priest in this Diocese, used to speak about the Hebrew word, RUACH, which means wind or breath. He said that the sound of the word, RUACH, sounded like wind. It is the word for Divine Inspiration, and as Jesus said, the wind blows where it wills. The Native Americans of this land spoke of God as Father and as Great Spirit, which seem to be very much akin to Christianity. In fact, there is a strong attraction to our church among Native Americans, and in South Dakota, where fully one-half of the members of the Episcopal Church are Native Americans—Oglala and Lakota. I helped to build a church on the Pine Ridge Reservation back in the 1980s and saw the work of the Holy Spirit there, bringing people together in “a spirit of love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.”

I believe that the Holy Spirit works among us in powerful ways. I felt this way last Sunday when Caleb played and sang the Offertory, and when we met in the Little House to share our thoughts and feelings about Beans & Rice. It is important for us to open our hearts and minds to the work of the Holy Spirit—and to ask for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit named in the Book of Isaiah. They are Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Strength, Faith, and Holy Fear.

Just imagine what power and purpose we would feel if the people of Epiphany Church in Tallassee were to pray for these spiritual gifts. Perhaps we should make a point to include these in our Prayers of the People for the Long Green Season after Pentecost:

Let's do that: We ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to the spiritual gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Strength, Faith, and Holy Fear.
AMEN.