

Made Holy by the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-21, John 14:23-31

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Word and the Holy Spirit go together. The Holy Spirit makes us holy by one way and one way only: the speaking of the Word, proceeding out of the Word made flesh: Jesus, He who is begotten of the Father from eternity. Truly truly I say to you, if anyone in this building today loves Jesus, you will keep (you will treasure) His word which makes you holy, and the Father will love you, and the Father and the Son will come to you and make their home with you. Thus the clear promise in our text. The Words of Jesus makes one as holy as the Holy Spirit is holy. When you receive the Gospel – in Word, and in Sacrament – that causes the incredible miracle of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit coming and making their home of peace within you.

And this activity creates the Church, the holy people, the holy fellowship, the holy common union (the holy communion), the holy nation called out of darkness and into His marvelous light by the holiness of the Word of God proclaimed to you and written down for you in Holy Scripture. We are not any mere social organization designed merely to help each other out through this world, but a place of those set apart by God through the Word and Sacrament.

Really the phrase “word and sacrament” is a redundancy. Without the Word, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is just plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace and a washing of the new birth from above in the Holy Spirit, which even gives the Holy Spirit. The water is required, but the Word is the power, by the divine promise of God.

Remember the story of the bronze serpent that Moses fashioned and lifted up to cure the people of the fiery snake bites in the wilderness. It would’ve had no power to do anything unless

God told Moses to do this, thus attaching His Word of promise. When God said “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live,” if Moses decided to set the serpent on a table, it would’ve done nothing. If Moses told the people to touch it with their eyes closed, it would’ve done nothing. But only because Moses did what the Lord instituted how the Lord said to do it, and the people looked up at it on the pole and trusted the promise attached to that activity, it became a saving bronze serpent. It was the power of God’s Word attached to the created element that made that bronze serpent a sacrament. So, too, it is the power of God’s Word that joins itself to the waters of Baptism, the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, that gives the recipient what God says it gives: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We wouldn’t trust in these created visible elements if God didn’t promise the essence of the Gospel through them.

Consider that without God’s institution, mandate, and promise that leads us to see Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as highly as we do --- if it weren’t for God’s institution, we would be worse idolaters than those who fashioned the golden calf. Instead of a golden calf, we would be worshippers of water, bread, and wine, trying to earn our way into heaven through them. That’s always the charge of Protestants against us, that if salvation is in the water and in the bread and wine, then it’s one’s own work of being baptizing, one’s own work of eating and drinking that thus earns salvation. But even for the Protestant, there’s no denying that Jesus commanded Baptism and commanded the Lord’s Supper. That’s why *they* still do them, oddly enough, saying they do them in order to please Jesus’ command. I’m not quite sure how that’s *not* works righteousness.

Nevertheless, to their criticism: maybe, just maybe, these Sacraments aren’t true commands in the finest sense of the word “command”; that is, that Baptism isn’t the 11th

commandment ordinance and the Lord's Supper the 12th commandment ordinance for us to *obey* as Law. If that were really the case, we actually shouldn't do them if these were new ceremonies designed by Jesus for us to earn our salvation. Jesus is not a new Moses, but came to save the world by fulfilling that Old Testament Law.

So maybe following His command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations by baptizing" isn't a true command for *me* to follow in order to show God how dedicated *I* am to Him. Maybe "Take, eat" or "drink of it all of you," or "do this in my remembrance" aren't the imperatives of a dictator, or God giving us opportunities to earn brownie points with Him, or to somehow ascend my thoughts to heaven in order to remember Him...*somehow* through the bread and wine.

But instead, *maybe instead* of imperative commands, these are actually *invitations* to receive Him and His grace which is *under* these elements. Maybe, just maybe, God is the one who wants to work in us by not commanding, per se, but *inviting* us to the font or to the table. If the President of the US were to command you to come to His oval office in order to offer him and his administration your authoritative input on how to handle inflation or gas prices or Ukraine, and he even provides the motorcade to drive you to Air Force One to fly you to Washington, you wouldn't see that command into His presence as a burden, but rather an exciting invitation. Good news, not the compulsion of law. When your spouse says, "kiss me," you don't say "don't boss me around," but you consider that grammatical imperative to be a gracious invitation into the warm embrace of your beloved.

So too, when the Lord says to you to come to the font, come to the bread and wine, yeah... you're the one *doing* the walking or *doing* the holding out of your hands or the opening of your mouth. But that's an *invitation* to the font of grace, an invitation to the rail of *mercy*.

Dear saints, God the Holy Spirit wants to save you and make you holy by the Son from the Father. So much so that He doesn't want you to search for Him for your whole life in the hidden realm of your feelings, or in some supernatural weird knowledge. No, He wants to simply speak to you clearly, that you can trust in His spoken Word that transforms simple water into a saving Jesus water, simple bread into the Jesus body of life, simple wine into the Jesus forgiving blood.

And we can never be done in this life with receiving His Word and Sacraments which makes us evermore holy, because in this world and life we remain infected with unholiness. The holiness worked in you by the Spirit has begun to eat away at your sinful nature, by the power of His convicting Law and consoling Gospel, the Word and Sacraments. But because your lingering sinful flesh keeps falling for temptations, you need more of the Holy Spirit to bring you more of Jesus. And He isn't just found anywhere, He's found where He says He's found: in His spoken Word, His forgiveness from the Pastor as from God Himself, His powerful water, and the bread and wine that *God says* becomes His own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, by the power of those words spoken on the night He was betrayed and given to us to repeat in the same. So long as you can touch your body and see that you still have flesh and blood in this corrupt world, you have need for more of the grace of Jesus.

Look around and see that you are still in the world, see the unrest and fear that still infect our news cycle, even infects our own cities. See that you yourself are tempted to your own versions of fear, or anger, or sadness, or bitterness, or tempted to the lust of keeping more and more of your money. See how tempted to pride you are by thinking yourself a far holier person than Biden, or Trump, or Johnny Depp or Amber Heard or anybody you may look down upon in this life. When that's no longer the case, when you're out of the sinful flesh, when you're no longer tempted, *then* you shall be satisfied and done with receiving these marks of the Holy

Spirit, the marks of the church: His Word, His bread, His wine, His water, His forgiveness from the pastor as from God Himself. We *will* be done with these one day. They will fade into the past, and that *will* be a glorious day, when the tears of all the owners of all the looted stores in our country are dried up, when *your* tears dry up. On that day, the tears will stop as we will stop inflicting one another with our enmity, strife, jealousy, and fits of anger.

But in the meantime, the Holy Spirit has created on this Pentecost Day His Church, the communion of saints struggling against sin. He has created ex nihilo the forgiveness of sins which allows us to extend to each other. He has created the message of the resurrection of the body on the last day, and the hope of life everlasting. Since the birth of the church on that first Christian Pentecost Day to this Pentecost day now, and so it will be till He comes again, as we devote ourselves in these matters to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. This is what it means to be church, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Church is not a mere social club, but is a gathering of sinners craving grace and mercy and receiving exactly that, to be strengthened for the chaos that awaits us outside these doors, and to give strength to each other. The peace that will carry you through this next week of chaos is the sanctifying truth: Christ has died. He is risen. Take, eat; this is My body, given for you. Drink of it, all of you for the forgiveness of your sins. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.