

# SAINT PAUL'S CHURCH

**Pentecost**

May 23, 2021

*If ye love me, keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*

In the Name ✠ of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

The Holy Ghost, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, God Himself, descended upon the Apostles in a mighty rushing wind and as tongues of fire on the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost marked a feast of harvest for the Jews, and we hear in the Epistle lesson that by the Holy Ghost, the harvest of souls began. The feast of the Jews that marked the fiftieth day after the Passover commemorated when Moses ascended Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments. God descended on Sinai as well in thunder, smoke, and fire. God the Holy Ghost would also give us a Law on this day, but these commandments would not be etched into tablets of stone, but upon the very hearts of all those who would believe. The Great commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ to “love the Lord thy God” and to “love our neighbors as ourselves” is not something that can be accomplished through external observances, but by the very renewal of our souls. The Holy Ghost is the final and most marvelous benefit of Christ’s love for us. The Holy Ghost, the very bond of Love between the Father and the Son, is now poured out in fire, indwelling us, and enflaming our souls with that same divine love shared by the Godhead.

It is this very same Holy Ghost that was there at the beginning when God created all things. It was He that *moved upon the face of the waters*. God first poured out His love when He created man and breathed His Spirit into Adam and he became *a living soul*. The Holy Ghost animates and enlivens the whole of Creation. By Him, everything moves and acts and lives according to its nature reflecting the very life and love of God. Pentecost is the feast of Love, the fulfillment of all of Christ’s promises and work for our redemption; Christ made our human nature a fit Temple for the Holy Ghost to dwell in, and when He dwells within us, the Son and the Father also dwell within us, and we in them. Christ possessed the Spirit in full, for in Christ *dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. What Jesus possesses in His divine nature He grants to us, His Body, His people, by grace. It is by the Holy Ghost that we can pray in our liturgy,

“that he may dwell in us, and we in him.” We are filled with the love of God because we are filled *with* God Himself.

Jesus tells the disciples, *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. It seems to say that if we keep Christ’s commandments, then He will pray for the Comforter to come. How can we keep our Lord’s commandments without love for Him? And how can we love Him without the Holy Ghost, who is Love Himself? Furthermore the Holy Scriptures say, *no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*. The Apostles certainly knew and believed that Jesus was Lord and they loved Him. What does Jesus mean? Is the Holy Spirit contingent upon keeping our Lord’s commandments in perfection?

This does not seem to be the case because the Lord in His ministry often used the imperfect to accomplish great miracles. In Mark’s Gospel, a desperate father brought his son to Jesus who was possessed by a demon, and asked Jesus to deliver him. Jesus replies, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*. The father responds, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*. Christ then delivered the child and cast out the demon. What was acceptable to the Lord? The perfection of faith? What of St. Peter when Jesus says to him, *Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake*. Was Peter’s love for Christ perfect? No. We often see Jesus use a brackish mix of faith and doubt. The Lord could take this imperfect faith and imperfect love and transform it into something better and more perfect. He but needs a ready will.

Such is the love that the Apostles then had for Jesus. It was there, wrought by Christ, but it was not yet the fulness of love. They had the Holy Spirit enough to call Jesus ‘Lord’ sincerely, but it was not yet the fulness of the Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost. For all of us, save Christ, the Spirit is given in measure. One of the great bishops and Anglican luminaries of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Lancelot Andrewes, put it this way, *Where there is measure, there are degrees: where there be degrees of more and less, the more may well be promised to him that hath the less. To him that hath it in the degree of warm breath, it may well be promised in tongues of fire*.

Pentecost is the day which fulfills the promise from the Prophet Joel, *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh*. Where the flickering flames and brief sparks of the Spirit seen throughout Holy Scripture and all of human history are fanned by Christ Himself, never to be put out. While imperfections may be used by the Lord, He is not satisfied

until the fire of Spirit has purified every part of His new Creation, that every soul might offer up the true and spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; God and man united by the Spirit, never to be put separated again by sin, so that *God may be all in all*. This union between God and Man in and through Christ is clearly seen in the two feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost. They must be taken together. In the Ascension, Christ brought mankind up with Him to God and in Pentecost Christ sends the Spirit, God Himself, down to man to dwell with us forever. This union cannot be broken and will be completed at the Second Coming when Christ returns in power, majesty, and glory.

This union is so powerful, that the Spirit continues the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus calls the Spirit *another Comforter*, an old English word for “Advocate” or “Helper”, meaning that Christ Himself is also a Comforter or Advocate. We see that God graciously has one ministry with two aspects: a heavenly and earthly. Christ, now ascended, advocates for us in heaven before the Father, pleading His one Sacrifice of Himself once offered. The Spirit, descended to us to indwell us forever, advocates and makes intercession for us here on earth to the Father with, as the Apostle tells us, *groanings which cannot be uttered*. The entirety of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for the sake of love for one another and love for mankind acts for our salvation. The Son prays, the Father gives, and the Spirit abides working to sanctify every Christian by bringing them into a deeper and more perfect union with the Godhead. Right now that union is made more perfect, by degree, through the Spirit going into all of the world in the ministry of the Church, that the Christian may love as he ought; that he may love as Christ loves. That we may love Christ by keeping His commandments, just as Christ loves the Father and keeps the Father’s commandments. *But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do*. If we embrace and love the Son, we embrace and love His Father, and the Spirit dwells within us.

If we ever find keeping Christ’s commandments difficult, we must realize that there are competing loves, other strange fires in our souls that are opposed to that indwelling fire of the Holy Ghost. The various lusts of the world all work to overpower and extinguish the fire of the love of God within us. Christ says, *my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*. Christ is true, and His burden is no burden when empowered by and accomplished through love. Yet, sometimes the commandments of our Lord are hard to keep. The yoke of Christ feels like it will crush us. Why? This is our imperfectness, our sin, our flesh that wars against the work of the Spirit. The fire of God’s love must purify our own loves. While God works with imperfect faith and love every day, He

does not do so to leave them imperfect. The father of the demoniac child believed more perfectly when his son was delivered by Christ. St. Peter followed Christ after the miraculous catch, loving Christ even when it meant that he would be crucified in Rome for Christ's sake. All of this is the work of the Spirit, purging our love for wicked things, ordering our love for good things rightly, that we may be like Jesus Christ. This is not of our own doing, but by the power of God. It may not be visible to you. Often His work is imperceptible day-to-day, and can only be measured when we look back over our lives. What the Spirit requires is a ready will. Are you willing? If not, then pray, because even a ready will is a gift from the Spirit.

This work of the Spirit to sanctify is not an individualized effort. It happens in the ministry of the Church among the Body of believers. It follows the same pattern. We offer to God simple and imperfect elements of bread and wine. By the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit then brings to us something perfect: Christ's own Body and Blood for the work of grace and redemption; to perfect you, to stoke the fire of the love of God in your soul, to make you an instrument of God's grace in the world, that God *may be all in all*.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD HATH FILLED THE WHOLE WORLD, ALLELUIA.

In the Name ✠ of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*