

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Pentecost, May 31, 2009

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Hymns: 224, 230, 234 232, 231.

Lessons: Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:1-21, Matthew 28:16-20

Text: Acts 2: 17a.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Pentecost is often called the festival of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit. The KJV uses "Holy Ghost"; the NIV usually uses "Holy Spirit". Both names refer to the same being, the third person of the Triune God. Jesus talked to his disciples through the Holy Ghost, as we read in Acts 1:2: *"until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen."* He promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers as we read a few verses later: *"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* Acts 1:5.

Luke records the following immediately before Jesus ascended into heaven: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Acts 1:8. Our epistle lesson today tells us about the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples, on the 50th day after his Resurrection, a Jewish festival called Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover. Today let's look at

**THE WORK OF THE
HOLY GHOST**

- 1. The work of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost.**
- 2. The work of the Holy Ghost in our lives.**

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a most unusual manner. *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."* He came with the sound of a loud wind, and the appearance of tongues of fire. This fulfilled the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11: *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

This also fulfilled the prophecy of Joel that the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all people. At this time, it was first to the disciples of Jesus, and because 15 nations or regions are mentioned, we believe that this gift was not given only to the 12 apostles. *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."* Acts 2:17-18.

What a remarkable gift! They could speak to foreigners in languages they had never learned! Apparently this gift, called "speaking in tongues", was given by God often during the early decades of the New Testament era, for St. Paul speaks of this a number of times in his letters. There are people today who claim that in order to be a Christian, you need to experience similar gifts of the Holy Ghost, such as speaking in strange words. At the very least, we look upon such claims with skepticism because all believers have gifts of the Holy Ghost already, as you shall be reminded in just a few minutes. St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:9: *"Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air."* Later in that chapter, he writes *"in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."* 1 Corinthians 14:19.

Please remember the purpose of this speaking in foreign languages, for that is what it was. It was not just gibberish, or babbling. It was telling of the wonders of God in sending his Son Jesus Christ the Messiah. The hearers asked *"how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"* Acts 2:8-11 – and then there is a listing of the nations represented that day – *"we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"*

So the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity came upon believers on that day! Should we feel cheated, or disappointed that we don't experience such visible miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost? Of course not! The Holy Spirit is poured out on us through the Word of God, whenever and wherever it is read or heard. In that way it is also offered and poured out for all people, as Joel promised. Peter writes in his second letter *"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* 2 Peter 1:21.

Every Word of God in the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul in his letter to the Romans makes reference to the words of Moses: *"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* Romans 10:8-17.

Later in his marvelous, God-inspired sermon on Pentecost, Peter says this of Jesus: *"Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."* Acts 2:33. The Law of God which Peter preached that day pricked their hearts and they wondered how they could be saved. *"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Acts 2:38.

That passage points to the gift of the Holy Ghost that comes to every one at their baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Remember that baptism is not simple water, but water used by God's command and connected with God's Word. **WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR US?** Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. **What is God's promise?** Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* You may then ask **HOW CAN WATER DO SUCH GREAT THINGS?** It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with the Word it is Baptism. God's Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit. **Where is this written?** St. Paul says in Titus, chapter 3, *"God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."*

Many are baptized as infants, and that may include you. But for those who, when they are older, hear and learn of Jesus Christ and then ask to be baptized, we also see the work of the Holy Ghost, using the Word of God as a means of grace.

Then of course, we have to answer "YES" to St. Paul's question in 1 Corinthians 3:16: *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* God's Holy Spirit lives in every Christian. However, many who have been baptized fight against that Holy Spirit and follow the ways and beliefs of the unbelieving world and thus lose or forfeit eternal life. Then there are those who have never heard

of and thus have never believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and so are damned eternally. Is there more we can do to share the Gospel we have learned and believe?

As we come to understand the third article of the Apostles' Creed, we admit that we cannot by our own reason, strength, or will believe in Christ. Conversion to faith is a work of divine grace. The Holy Ghost operates through the means of grace. And the means of grace are the Gospel in the Word and the Gospel in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

By his work of redemption Christ earned for all men the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life and salvation. But this wouldn't benefit anyone if it were not for the work of sanctification, which is the work of the Holy Ghost. If men are to be saved by the redemption earned through Christ, this redemption must be offered, given to, and received by men. This work of sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost.

If we examine Scripture, the Words the Holy Ghost caused to be written, we find that God the Holy Ghost works through the means of grace. Just as the water that is in the well won't get to your home without some means or methods or conveyance – pipes and water storage tanks, so too the salvation Jesus earned won't get to you without some means or method. Just as you can't travel from one place to another without some means of transportation – walking, riding bike or car or bus – so you cannot receive God's un-deserved love and goodness, his "grace" without a means of grace.

God's means of grace works in this way: The Holy Spirit teaches man to know the Gospel. He impresses and moves his heart, and turns his will. But the Holy Ghost uses spiritual things, not earthly things – he uses the Word of God. St. Paul writes of this process in this way: *"We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."* 1 Corinthians 2:6-13.

One writer spoke of a logical sequence in conversion. In this work of grace, by which sinners are saved, the Holy Spirit uses a very definite method in which we see the following steps:

1. By the Law, the Holy Ghost works in man knowledge of sin and contrition of heart;
2. By the Gospel he calls penitent sinners to Christ;
3. He converts them by working faith in their hearts;
4. He justifies them through this faith;
5. He sanctifies them in this faith and
6. He preserves them in this faith unto salvation.

Although in individuals the details may vary, there is only one way men are saved. When his disciples asked him the way to heaven, *"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* John 14:6. Peter proclaimed: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12.

You, today, have again, by the grace of God, heard about that name of Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit work in you every day and preserve you unto eternal salvation. Amen.