

## "Pentecost Is About the Renewal of the World"

Text: Acts 2:1-2

6/9/2019

There's a little prayer that I say often, sometimes as soon as I get out of bed, and it goes like this:

"God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, set up Your reign; in our midst.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Holy Spirit, Breath of the living God, renew me and all the world."

I'll say those words, and then in remembrance of my Baptism I'll speak the words of the 1st Invocation (In the Name of the Father ... ), and then I'll continue on with my prayers. I have to admit that I didn't come up with that prayer on my own, but I got it out of a book by biblical scholar N.T. Wright, who cites it as a prayer that has been used in different church traditions for centuries. I find it works really well to center my thoughts on God - both Who He is and what He does for me and my salvation.

That prayer speaks to the meaning of this day: Pentecost, especially the last part where we ask the Holy Spirit to renew us "and all the world." Pentecost is about the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is about the Holy Spirit renewing "all the world." Let me show you what I mean ...

As we do, we return to today's 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, where we hear again from the book of Acts. St. Luke's account of the first Christian Pentecost. I say that Luke tells us of the first Christian Pentecost because Pentecost was originally a feast of the Jews, dating all the way back to the time of Moses and the children of Israel (Leviticus 23). Pentecost was originally a feast that was celebrated every Spring, as a harvest festival that commemorated the Lord's provision of His people. In referring to that Luke writes today that there were:

" ... staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. "(2: 5)

Those God-fearing Jews were in Jerusalem to celebrate the *Jewish* feast of Pentecost.

Of course 50 days after Easter/ 10 days after our Lord's Ascension the Jewish feast of Pentecost became a Christian feast, as Luke goes on to write of how the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' first followers - the apostles, and the rest of their group of 120 or so - enabling them to speak in the languages of the people gathered there. And that is something worth taking note of, the fact that they did NOT speak there in tongues in the sense of the way Paul speaks of tongues in 1 Corinthians; they simply spoke in the languages - i.e., foreign tongues - of the many pilgrims who had journeyed from far and wide to attend the feast.

Luke tells us they spoke of:

"... the mighty deeds of God."(v.11)

which is to say they spoke of the deeds of Jesus, Who - as Peter went on to preach later that day, in his Pentecost sermon - had been crucified, raised, and ascended. Peter says that Jesus, in His death and resurrection, had "put an end to the agony of death," and also that, after having ascended to His Father, He poured out His Spirit on Peter and the rest of them, enabling them to speak, even in foreign languages, of what God had done to save the world in His Son. Peter quoted the prophet Joel to make his point, saying that:

"This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'It shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour out My Spirit on all people ...'"(vs.16- 17a,)

"This," Peter says, "is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel. .. ": the pouring out of the Holy Spirit - in the form of tongues of fire on the disciples' heads and the sound of a rushing wind. The Spirit of God - the Helper, Whom Jesus says in today's Gospel comes from the Father - enabled the disciples to speak of God's "mighty deeds." The Spirit of God enabled the disciples to speak of those deeds in languages that before had been foreign to them, but by His power became tools for them to unite people of all languages into one Church - the Church of Jesus Christ. As the disciples went out and spoke of Jesus in those languages, uniting people together from all over the world, they became part of what God was doing to unite the world by faith in Jesus; they became part of what God the Holy Spirit was doing to renew the world.

That Spirit led Peter to preach from the prophet Joel, saying:

"It shall be that everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved."(v.21; Joel 2:32)

And in explaining Joel's words, Peter said:

"Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus Whom you crucified."(Acts 2:36)

Peter says there that Jesus is Lord. Therefore, when he quotes Joel as saying that "everyone who calls on the Name *of the Lord* will be saved," he's saying everyone who calls on the Name *of Jesus* will be saved. And note that he says "*everyone*" who calls on the Name of Jesus will be saved. That's the message of Pentecost - it's the message of Christianity: the salvation *of everyone* & the renewal *of all the world*.

This speaks to the second line of that little prayer we began with, where we heard of the "Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, (Who has) mercy on (us sinners)." Because to renew the world in the disciples' day meant renewing even those who had condemned Jesus to death, those who had handed Him over to Pilate for crucifixion. Peter says, in the words immediately following those of today's lesson (right after his quote of Joel):

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, ... YOU nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."(vs. 22a, 23b)

Folks, Peter speaks the words of today's text to those who crucified his Lord! And as he speaks to them, he speaks to them mercy; he speaks to them salvation; he speaks to them forgiveness, going on to say that they needed to:

" ... Repent, and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of (their) sins; ... "(2:28)

As those who were responsible for Jesus' death repented and were baptized, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit - the same Spirit bestowed on the Church in the miracle of Pentecost. And think of that: the Spirit of God - which, as we've heard in our last several Sunday's Gospel readings, is the Spirit of Jesus - was given to those who were responsible for killing Jesus. Of all people, they had their sins - including the sin of killing Jesus - forgiven. Salvation was for them too; Jesus' mercy was for them. When the Holy Spirit came to renew the world, He came to renew them.

He renews us also. No matter what we've done wrong, or failed to do right; no matter how bad we've been, or how good we've failed to be; whenever we pray asking Jesus for mercy, Jesus answers our prayers with a resounding "yes!" Jesus forgave those who were responsible for crucifying Him! Jesus forgives the sins of you and me, and all people who, like those in the Tower of Babel story in today's O.T. Lesson, turn from God to go their/our own way.

In today's 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading we're told that about 3,000 people were added to the Church that first day of Pentecost, through Holy Baptism. We too, having been baptized, are part of their number. As we hear the Word of our Lord and receive His Sacraments, we know that the blessings of Pentecost are for us, for as Joel says, everyone - no matter how great or small; no matter how sinful - everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved. That's Pentecost: Pentecost is about Jesus sending His Spirit to save every rotten sinner who ever lived. Pentecost is about the renewal of the world.

That renewal will be complete on the Last Day, when Jesus comes again in glory. But Peter says in his Pentecost sermon that we've already entered into the last days before that Day with the entrance of the Spirit. Again:

"This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'It shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour out My Spirit on all people ... '"

With the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost the world entered into its "last days" of existence under the curse of sin (Gen. 3), the "last days" before THE Day when all of creation will be set free from the curse of sin to again be good (Rom. 8 & Gen. 1). In the time between now and then we have been given the Holy Spirit so that we can do two things: 1) believe what God's Word says about His Son Jesus, and 2) share that Word with others, that they too might believe. My friends in Christ, we are part of what God is doing, even now, to renew the world.

And with that we conclude. I shared with you at the beginning a little prayer I often say, a prayer that, again, goes like this:

"God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, set up Your reign in our midst.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Holy Spirit, Breath of the living God, renew me and all the world."

God the Father Almighty sets up His reign in our midst through the forgiveness of His Son Jesus, Who lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven that every sinner might receive mercy. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to call people to faith in Jesus by Means of the Breath of God that is His Word. As we take that Word out of this church into the world, we offer that world renewal, the renewal of again being good and belonging to God.

That is what Pentecost is about: the renewal of the world-

- In Jesus' † Name,

Amen!