

On the First Holy Day of Pentecost

By

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(Translated by Jason Oakland and Wade Johnston)

Lord Jesus Christ, You had once spoken to Your beloved disciples shortly before You went back to the Father, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”¹ You have now gone away and You now sit on the spring from which You can guide down streams of living water to all hearts languishing after Your heavenly comfort. You have also fulfilled that promise once that day and a thousand times since in all times. O fulfill it in these days also on us. Let a gracious, mild rain of Your Holy Spirit fall from the thunder of Your Word on our parched hearts. Do not think on this today, that You have already so often saturated them and that they have not become flourishing and blossoming in Your love; but look alone on how we need Your Holy Spirit, how we need His help, His light, His power, His comfort, and His peace. O give us, Lord, this most precious of all gifts so we have all that we need. Hear us for the sake of Your eternal grace and faithfulness, Amen. Amen

In Christ, Beloved Hearers!

If it has ever really become apparent how futile and fleeting, how transitory and feeble is everything earthly, then it has happened in these times of ours.² The greatest powers of the earth now sink into impotency; the most glorious crowns now fall from the heads of their bearers; the strongest thrones, which appear to defy all tremors of time, now stagger and reel; alliances of states, which appear to have been indissoluble after a thousand year existence, now come apart suddenly at the seams. Overall we set our eyes on places of destruction and devastation; there floodwaters devastate entire joyful regions; there blazing fire destroys busy cities and streets; there entire lands and peoples stand in bright flames, kindled by the torch of war and rebellion. Before all, however, there is death,³ which prowls invisibly around the earth as a sinister ghost and with his great scythe mows down young and old, noble and common, rich and poor as the grass of the field. From the palace as from the hut, one carries out now daily and hourly the bodies of those, most of whom on the day before moved along in the fullness of human strength. Overall now flow innumerable tears and a thousand sighs wrench themselves from the stifled hearts of men. The entire world now lies as in feverish agitation; nowhere is there rest, nowhere peace; and joy, which still goes about here and there, is nothing more than a contrived sound with which one seeks to deafen the involuntary sighs of the oppressed heart. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless,”⁴ so must we all now cry out, if we look back on the glory of the world, which lies already in ruins everywhere.

In this time of unrest and belligerence, the Holy Festival of Pentecost has appeared today for us Christians. A more beautiful festival, a festival of which we have more need, we could not celebrate. The festival of Pentecost preaches to us namely the peace, which surpasses all understanding, and which the world with all that is in it can never give. It announces to us that it gives in the midst of a visible world full of turbulence and invisible kingdom of the Spirit, where undisturbed peace rules. It call to us, “Seek, O man, the peace not from you but you want to find it in this peaceless world, then

¹ John 16:7b

² Gehalten im Jahre 1849. Celebrated/observed/preached in 1849.

³ Cholera

⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:2

open your heart to the Word of Your God, then His Spirit, the Spirit of peace and joy will enter into you and make your heart into a dwelling of peace, happiness and salvation.

So let us welcome it, the festival of heaven in our earthly need; let us welcome the message of peace and joy under the tidings of fear, which now penetrates into our ears from all places and ends, from near and far; yes, come all you who are tired from the journey through the barren land of this earth, let us now assemble ourselves around the wide and deep springs of the divine Word and drink ourselves full of it and be strengthened, with it we will be strong and courageous again, to sojourn farther until we arrive in the tents of eternal peace.

Acts 2:1-13

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

I.

That a man must be pious if he wants to please God, that is, my dear ones, an absolute truth, which only the one who denies God Himself can deny.

Likewise, it is also certain that it not only belongs to piety that a man does some good works, but that, in addition, before all else belongs a pious, God-loving heart, and a willing spirit that surrenders itself to the will of God. For God looks not so much at the deeds, but rather at the heart. Also, to this [the heart] He gives still more.

But now, as to how a man comes to such a pious heart and to such a willing spirit, the thoughts of men are divided

The majority suppose, since the law has not only been written for men on the heart, but also still especially revealed through Moses and recorded in holy Scripture, that Man can become pious through it, that he can come to love and, therefore, to God’s pleasure.

Yet that is an error through which millions of men have already gone to destruction; and the same is actually refuted through the visible effusion of the Holy Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost.

In order to examine this rightly, we must consider the following: the Holy Spirit, who alone purifies and sanctifies the heart of Man, who alone can cause the love of God to overflow in them and give them a new, willing spirit; the Holy Spirit, I say, has always indeed worked in the world, also still before he was pouring forth over the disciples on the first Christian Pentecost; however, until that point He had done His work strictly in secret and had not yet revealed Himself to all the world. This is the first time, since Christ had completed the work of redemption, having suffered for our sins and having shed His blood, dying on the cross, having risen from the dead and finally having ascended into heaven. Now first, after the waters of the sin flood had passed, so to speak, the Holy Spirit flew—this

heavenly dove—with the olive leaves⁵ of peace and reconciliation into the ark of the Church before the eyes of all the world. Now first, He was visibly poured over the apostles. Now first, He let Himself be clearly heard in the roar of the powerful wind, which filled the house where the disciples sat. Now first, He let Himself also be clearly seen in the flames, which hovered over the heads of the disciples in the shape of a burning tongue.

And indeed this happened precisely on the day when the Jewish people celebrated the Old Testament⁶ Pentecost, to remember the fiftieth day after the exodus of the same from Egypt, when the revelation of the law upon Mount Sinai occurred.

In so doing, God wanted to indicate that now the Old Testament Law-Pentecost should be abrogated by a new, evangelical and Christian Pentecost of grace. He wanted to indicate with this that the Holy Spirit does not come through the law, but alone through the Gospel of Christ. For what is the teaching through which the Holy Spirit comes over the apostles? Does He come under the thunder of the law, which long ago rolled over the summit of Sinai? Does a consuming fire, which once revealed the Lord of the law upon Sinai, go over him here? Did the earth also shake here? No! Indeed a roaring arises, as the roar of a powerful wind, but the storm wind shatters nothing, but only fills the house with majesty. Indeed a flames shine, but the fire consumes nothing, but only inflames the hearts of those over whose heads it hangs. And what is it, what does the Holy Spirit now give the apostles to declare? The marveled hearers call out, “We hear them telling the great deeds of God in our own tongues.” And in the following we read what the great deeds of God were. Immediately after our text, it is related to us that Peter got up and preached about Christ. He spoke among other things: “Jesus from Nazareth, who showed Himself a Man from God among you with deeds and wonders and signs, the same you have taken with unrighteous hands, and you nailed and put to death, whom God has raised. Therefore, let the entire house of Israel now know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, a Lord and Christ. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins; thus you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” What was it also that the Holy Spirit gave the apostles to declare? It was not the teaching of deeds, which men should do, but the teaching of the great deeds of God, namely, what the Son of God has done for us; in a word, it was not the law, but the gospel of Christ.

See here, my dear ones, that the chief thing of what we celebrate today surely does not lie in the fact that the dear disciples received, through the Holy Spirit, the gift to speak in foreign languages which they had never learned, to do wonders, and to preach the Word of God without error to all the world; the chief thing rather lies in that: God has chosen to reveal to all the world that, not the law, but the gospel gives the Spirit. The visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the first Christian Pentecost should be a public, heavenly witness and seal that only the Gospel is the Word of the Spirit that makes living, holy, and blessed.

Here perhaps many will say: How? Is the law, are the Ten Commandments not also a teaching revealed from God? Should this teaching not also make a man pious, and cannot a man be saved through it as well? Does the law not say: “Do this and so you will live? Keep the commands so will inherit eternal life.”

I answer: To be sure, the law is also a divine teaching; and were Man to remain in the condition in which God created him, so Man could also through the law become pious, righteous, holy, and be saved. However, we men have fallen, we have thereupon lost the image of God, and are, for that reason, all now by nature spiritually dead. That means we have no power residing in us in order to reject sin and to want good, and even less to act on it. We can only do external works of the law well; but a willing Spirit, which does not oppose good, we cannot give to ourselves.

⁵ *Oelblatt* ist das Wort. Ich konnte nicht dies finden in mein Duden. Habst du ein Stueck des Rates, mein Schatz?

⁶ *alttestamentliche*

To be sure, the law does say: “Love God above everything and your neighbor as yourself, thus you will be saved,” but it [the law] cannot pour this love into our hearts. To be sure, the law does say: “You should have no other gods, you should not misuse the name of the Lord your God,” etc, yet as often the law says to us: “You should!” it cannot give that ability to us. It says: “You should be holy, just as I am holy, the Lord your God; you should be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect,” but it cannot make us holy and perfect. It indeed gives a glorious, enticing promise to him who keeps it, but it is not able to give us the ability to do so. It also indeed speaks terrifying threats against the transgressor, but in so doing it can terrify our heart, but not change it. It indeed shows us a way that leads safely to heaven, but we cannot go on it. It indeed calls us to God, but while it calls us to God, it once more chases us away by its threats against the sinner. In short, the law indeed shows us a real righteousness, but not how we can obtain it for ourselves⁷; it indeed shows us our sins, but not how we can leave them⁸; it warns us of hell and damnation, but it tells us nothing about how we sinners may flee them; it shows us the crown, but tells us nothing about how we can attain it. It kills us, but does not make us living; it beats us down, but does not lift us up again; it plunges us into despair over our salvation, but after that it knows know other help. Yes, since the law places so many requirements, which we are not able to fulfill, and since it speaks such terrifying threats, which we cannot elude, so it makes our enmity against God only greater and finally brings us to that point that we hate God as an angry, cruel tyrant and, if we only could, so we would gladly push Him from His throne.

O how destitute we men would therefore be, if we had no other teaching than the holy Ten Commandments or the law! Then no man could be saved.

But fortunately for us the visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost is a matter-of-fact, heavenly testimony that there is yet one other teaching besides the law. It gives another teaching that gives us the Spirit that can make us living, righteous, and saved, and that is the teaching of the gospel of Christ. This requires no works from us, but grants us the works of Christ, and makes us, thereby, so joyful that we do good works with cheerful hearts and without compulsion. This [teaching] does not damn our sins, but forgives us them and, in so doing, makes us willing so that we renounce sin with a willing Spirit. This promises us heaven and salvation without our own merits or worthiness, out of pure, free grace and mercy, and, by that, makes us eager to praise and love God, who has done so much for us, and to do everything that pleases him. Where the Gospel resounds, there the heavenly storm wind roars and blows on us, and fills us with power for the eternal life; there new, heavenly flames burn over our heads, which kindle out entire hearts with the fire of heavenly love. With a word, where the Gospel rings out, there the Holy Spirit pours into all the hearts that are opened to Him.

II.

After we have now heard insofar the visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost was an actual witness for this, that not the Law but the Gospel of Christ gives the Spirit, so let us now consider as a second point what comfort of Pentecost and what warning of Pentecost lies in this for us.

First, what concerns the comfort of Pentecost, that there God will give His Spirit not through the Law but through the Gospel of Christ so all should and can receive Him.

Should we have earned this gift for ourselves, indeed, has God ever at all placed a legal condition which we must fulfill if we would have it, who then may hope to attain it? However, the Gospel is indeed for no one other than the sinner and indeed for all the sinners in the entire world. Therefore none should be excluded from the gift of the Holy Spirit; God considers none too unworthy

⁷ *aber nicht, wie wir sie uns erwerben koennen*

⁸ *aber nicht, wie wir sie lassen koennen*

for this; none have fallen too deep for God; none have too often deserted; none has too impure a heart; none has committed too many or too great a sin. Everyone should attain the highest gift which God has intended for man; the honor has been done to all that his body and soul becomes a tabernacle of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit. This avails the poor and rich, noble and lowly, old and young and also the greatest of sinners.

O what a comfort of Pentecost! After this, there is also no one among us who should and could have not yet today experienced the wonder of grace, that the Holy Spirit enters into him and makes a dwelling in him.

The warning of Pentecost now fits like a glove on the comfort of Pentecost; it consists of this: if you wish to partake of the Holy Spirit, then seek Him not in the Law but in the Gospel.

You certainly, you who still believe to be able to do enough of the Law; you who comfort and reassure yourselves with this, that you have outwardly done a few works of the Law, that men can credit you with nothing evil, that you have lived honorably and virtuously before the world; you who therefore still have not thirst for the living water of the Holy Spirit: you must first learn from the Law that you need the Holy Spirit. The Law must first enlighten you about your sins, before the Gospel can comfort you over them; the Law must first make you into a sinner before the Gospel can make you a saint; the Law must first knock you down and kill you, before the Gospel can stand you up and make you alive.

But you, you who have already died from the Law; you who are afraid of the threats of the Law; you who have obtained an offended conscience because of the Law; you who therefore are afraid of death, are afraid of judgment, are afraid of hell and damnation; you who have realized through it your powerlessness, your resistant heart, and that you are as parched as sand and as desolate and deserted as the scene of a fire: you believe perhaps you are not the least bit fit for the gift of the Holy Spirit. But know, to you, even to you who are like this, the Holy Spirit so very much would like to descend as dew from heaven. O, only lay hold of the dear promises of the Gospel through faith, and do not disturb yourselves with thoughts that indeed you are not worthy to enjoy even little drop of comfort. Here it does not go according to merit or worth, but according to free grace and mercy.

Therefore seek the Holy Spirit not in the Law; do not be troubled about your own preparedness or desire for betterment to obtain a willing spirit. In this way you remain lying in your powerlessness. Go to Jesus as you are and say to Him in faith: I am Yours, because You gave Your life and Your blood into death for my good. You are mine, because I lay hold of You and do not let You out of my heart, O my Light. Then He will pour out His Holy Spirit also into your hearts.

And O how blessed you will be then! Is it then still inclined to go on restless and without peace in the world; you then enjoy a peace which indeed becomes overcast as the sun but can not be destroyed. Indeed, this heavenly Comforter lives in our hearts, then though all earthly goods may be taken away from you; then you say with Job, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."⁹ You think then: if the peace of the soul is lost, all is lost; if the goods of the world are lost, nothing is lost.

Goods and blood (life and property), body, soul and life

Is not mine

God alone

It is who gave it.

⁹ Job 1:21

If he wants it to return again to Himself:

He takes it back,

But I will happily honor Him.

If you have the Holy Spirit, this heavenly Comforter, in your hearts, if “your” things may then perish, you do not fail; the inner comfort and joy dries the tears in your eyes; you stand on the grave yourself then as courageous victor and cry out triumphantly, Christ is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Him will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Him will never die.¹⁰ Hallelujah!

If you have the Holy Spirit, this heavenly Comforter in your hearts, if your own heart and conscience then deny all grace to you, accuse, and condemn you: you will not be without comfort even through this; then you have power to hold on to the Word even in the darkness; therefore you say with that poet:

And whether my heart speaks loudly, “No!”

The Word should be more certain to me;

I do not allow myself to be afraid.

Finally, when you come now also in your hour of death, and you have the heavenly Comforter in your heart, then you can say, “Christ is my life, therefore death is my victory. Then you see your deathbed as a triumphal vehicle on which you travel exultantly over the world and death and hell into the dwelling of the saints.

So the highest Comforter enters into all our hearts, leads us rich in victory through sin, the world, need, and death and finally helps us to the heavenly kingdom of Christ. There we will praise him perfectly on the eternal festival of Pentecost in the halls of heaven. Amen.

¹⁰ John 11:25-26