

*"The Feast of Pentecost"*

John 14.22

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Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" [John 14.22; NKJV]

Today we celebrate "The Feast of Pentecost," occurring 50 days after the Resurrection of Our Lord. On this day, Jesus fulfills His promise given to His disciples when He sends them the Holy Spirit.

I.

In His long teaching session in the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. He promises to send the Holy Spirit to His Church. Pointing to what the Holy Spirit Himself will do, Jesus says, "He will testify of Me ... He will not speak of Himself ... He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." In other words, the conversations and teachings brought into the church by the Holy Spirit will be conversations and teachings about Christ! What the Holy Spirit does is to call attention to Christ, not to Himself. This new chapter in the work of God begins on Pentecost, just as Jesus promised, and it continues to today.

When God the Son takes on a human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, He becomes man, without ceasing to be God. He becomes "incarnate," that is, He packs the fulness of His divinity into a human body. His presence is seen when His body is seen. When Jesus calls His disciples, when He walks with them, when He teaches them, they can see that He is with them. When Jesus is in Galilee at the time of the feast, He is not at the same time in Jerusalem for the feast. When the centurion comes from Capernaum to ask Jesus to heal of his servant, Jesus is not in Capernaum, still, He is able to heal the servant, just as the centurion believed He could.

But, then comes Pentecost, and we learn that now He is present, here, today, in this gathering around His Word and Sacrament. And in the bread and wine that will shortly be consecrated, His physical body and blood also will be present. At the same time, our Lord also is present throughout the world and throughout human time since Pentecost. Christ's ministry on earth continues in and through His church, by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

If it is difficult to describe accurately the time when Jesus took on the human nature and the human body for you, lived the perfect life for you, and died and rose to save you, with all that you can know of Christ from the Scriptures, you can understand the difficulty facing the disciples as they listened to Christ's last words before He is arrested, judged, and crucified. You can understand the confusion, the concern, and the passion with which the disciple asks, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us and not to the world?"

II.

Pentecost, and our Lord's new chapter of work on earth is the answer to that question. The world will not see Jesus, but Christians will know His presence. Wherever the Holy Spirit is at work, there Jesus is at work. Wherever the Holy Spirit speaks, there Jesus speaks. Wherever the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, there Jesus is presented as the offering for sin, the perfect righteousness for sinners, and the judgment against the devil.

Jesus is present in this world. He is present where the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacrament. Where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name—around Jesus' Word and Sacraments—there He is present through the working of the

Holy Spirit. Wherever the forgiveness of sins is pronounced to the people of God, there the Holy Spirit brings Jesus' promise and His authority to be heard. When you receive the Sacrament of the Altar that Jesus instituted in the Upper Room, there the Holy Spirit gives to you, through His apostolic ministry, not only bread and wine but also the very body and blood of Jesus. Jesus is as present today in this world with His body and blood, with His divine and human nature, as He was to the disciples.

The world knows nothing of this presence of Christ among us. The world knows about Jesus. His name is used with regularity in the cruder gatherings of mankind. His reputation, often distorted, is mentioned by the religious and the pagans alike. But, to the world, He is a figure from the past: to some, a great prophet, to others a charlatan, to still others only a myth. But to all the world today, absent. But not to His church!

Christ promises us His presence today. His authorized symbols remind us of His promise to be present, to reveal Himself to us and not to the world. The procession that begins the service symbolizes the truth that Jesus promises: Where the faithful are gathered around His Word and Sacrament, there He comes to be with them. The Gospel procession, where the Word of God is brought from the chancel to be read in the midst of the congregation, there we see Jesus coming from heaven to be among and to save, His people by His life, death, and resurrection, which the Holy Gospels proclaim to you. Such acts remind you of the fact that Jesus, in this Divine Service, is really present, through the work of the Holy Spirit and according to His promise, until He returns on the Last Day. This is the true message of the Feast of Pentecost for Christ's holy people.