

Pentecost
St. John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-21

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

I know I jumped a week ahead as you'll confess this and the rest of the Athanasian Creed for Holy Trinity Sunday, saying in no uncertain terms that you believe in one God in three Persons, distinct yet the same God. I bring up this portion of the Athanasian Creed because today is a day set aside to acknowledge the work of one of the Persons in particular—the Holy Ghost—and when speaking of the work of the Holy Ghost, one cannot escape speaking of the work of God in three Persons; one, because He is one God always at work in all three Persons whether it is recognized or acknowledged or not; and two, because the work of the Holy Ghost is almost always behind the scenes, if you will, calling attention primarily to the Son and His work.

But on the day of Pentecost, particular attention is paid to the Holy Ghost, and His work is more overt and pointed out in the Scripture. Yet, even on this day, the purpose for which the Holy Ghost acted openly was to point to the One who was and is God-with-us and His work for your salvation.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus spoke of this day. It's a short reading certainly worth hearing again:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Now, Jesus spoke a familiar lesson, one spoken to the Samaritan woman at the well. (cf. John 4:1-15) If you are thirsty, go to Christ and drink, and out of your heart will flow rivers of living water. This time, however, John explains that the Christ is speaking of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, if you thirst for righteousness, go to your Lord, and He will supply it and give you the Holy Ghost who creates and sustains faith.

Now, it must be said that this giving of the Holy Ghost that John wrote of in today's Gospel lesson is the fullest measure of giving which, before the Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, had not happened. Certainly, the Holy Ghost was active in times before this, as "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21); even as was read this morning:

Moses...gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. (Numbers 11:24-25)

And again, it must be said, that prophecy is not simply a telling of the future, but the speaking of the Word of God. This gift of the Holy Ghost certainly happened before the Jesus was glorified, as Moses and St. Peter gave witness, and the Holy Ghost was at work to create faith in God in these times, but He was not given in those times as He was on that first Pentecost Day.

For on that day, the disciples who had added Matthias to their number, were all together in one place, and the Holy Ghost came upon them and “gave them utterance,” as it is written in the New King James Version. They were given the gift of prophecy, not to tell the future, but to speak “the wonderful works of God.”

Some supposed them to be drunk, but Peter rose and refuted it; He cited Joel as now being fulfilled in their hearing: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

What did Peter prophesy? He spoke the Word of God:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it...This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing...Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36)

That is exactly the work of the Holy Ghost. He brings the Word to thirsting souls; or as Gary P. Baumler wrote,

God’s Holy Spirit leads thirsty souls to Jesus. He works the faith that drinks the refreshment Jesus offers. The Spirit enters the heart of a believer, and the believer calls others to learn of Jesus. When Jesus finished his work of salvation and entered into his glory, God’s Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers in special measure. This happened on Pentecost when the Spirit turned loose the streams of water from the disciples, and the water of life has flowed through believers to countless thirsting souls in every age since.

Now, some suppose this gift of the Holy Ghost will produce in the true believer the mark of, well, true belief, as they define this mark. If one has been baptized with the Holy Ghost, they will say, then they should be able to speak in tongues. And by this they mean speaking in some unintelligible babble, the meaning of which is known only to the speaker and God, though, supposedly, every once in a while someone else may come along who can interpret this babble, or so they will claim. However, the content of this babble need not be anything important. Oh, they’ll point to Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 13 as proof that unintelligible babble is a gift of the Holy Ghost, but they’ll overlook the fact that what the disciples were doing was speaking the word of God in languages that could be understood by the foreign Jews in Jerusalem, not otherwise worthless unintelligible babble.

On the contrary, the work of the Holy Ghost is to produce faith in Christ and to sustain that faith; “God’s Holy Spirit leads thirsty souls to Jesus. He works the faith that drinks the refreshment Jesus offers.” In these latter days, He is always at work to do this, and He draws little attention to Himself. He certainly shares in the glory of the Father and the Son, as, again, will be confessed next week, but it is His glory to bring people to Jesus and Jesus to people, even as the Reformers confessed, “For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel...” (ACV) His work is to point to the Son, sent by the Father, and the work He has accomplished for the salvation of the world. His work is to

point to the cross of Christ, and there to cause you to see Jesus upon it as the sacrifice for your sins—to see Him as your Substitute.

So, yes, dear hearers, you have this gift, too. For hear something else that Peter prophesied on that first Pentecost Day:

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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. (Acts 2:38-39)

You have been here, at this font or another, and have been baptized, and there your sin was washed off of you and onto your Savior, and the Holy Ghost was given to you to work in you faith, to give to you the forgiveness Christ won for you on the cross, and to secure you in the holy ark of Christendom—to keep you in this one, true faith. It wasn't your own reason and strength that brought you to Christ your Lord, but the Holy Ghost who "leads thirsty souls to Jesus"; who "works the faith that drinks the refreshment Jesus offers." There, in that most blessed flood, your Old Man was drowned, and a new man rose to live before God in righteousness and purity forever, because you were made to drink the living waters from Christ.

If some of those words sound familiar to those of you who have been catechized, they should. Today, the Nicene Creed is still confessed, whose words are similar and which meaning is the same as the Apostles' Creed, in which Third Article is confessed,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

This is most certainly true, dear Baptized! You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, who has created and sustained the true faith in you, calling you by the Gospel, enlightening you with His gifts. This is most certainly true, dear Baptized! You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, who has brought you to the well that doesn't run dry so that you will never thirst again, having in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life. This is most certainly true, dear Baptized! You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, therefore you are being kept with the whole Christian church on earth. This is most certainly true, dear Baptized! You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and by Him you can tell of the wonderful works of God to a world thirsting for righteousness. This is most certainly true, dear Baptized! You have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and He has even today richly forgiven you for all of your sins! And so, you will be raised on the Last Day to eternal life. This is most certainly true, thanks be to God—the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.