

Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost

"I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."

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A pagan philosopher was once to be put to death in Athens, in ancient times. He was a nuisance, half-mad, claiming to hear the voice of God in his head. Yet some believed that he really did hear the voice of God; that he was mad, but with the madness given by heaven. This philosopher cared of only one thing, to discover virtue; to know what it was to be a just man. Many of his follows called him a just man. He denied this. Rather, he said that there were no just men. In this, he was right, even Christian.

When asked about what would come of such a righteous person, the philosopher answered: 'the just person would be whipped, tormented on the rack, chained, his eyes mutilated, and when he had suffered every kind of evil, he would be crucified.'

Does it sound familiar? Is this not a sort of pagan prophecy of the Christian religion? What we hear from the mouth of the philosopher here is a simple, sighing, longing, 'I cannot be good, if only there were one that could be. I cannot follow God, if only there were one that would.'

The philosopher was put to death by mandatory suicide. His last words were: 'Offer a crow to Asclepius, that my debt may be paid.' Asclepius was the god of healing. He prayed for healing, of himself, of his people, of his city, that a debt of his unrighteousness might be paid; that the debt of mankind's sin might be abolished. That humanity might be saved.

When asked what the Gospel is, it is easy enough to say that it is the good news of Jesus Christ, that he died for our sins and was raised for our justification. It is easy enough to say that it is the message

that Jesus has overcome sin, death, and the devil on our behalf, and so has opened to us the way of life. And it is easy enough to say these things because they are entirely true. But John's Gospel reveals to us yet another facet of the great mystery of salvation. What is the Gospel? That Jesus Christ has loved the Father. That a man has truly loved God.

It is that there finally has been a just man.

It is that righteousness has appeared upon the earth.

It is that, in the person of Jesus, mankind has rendered to God what has always been asked of him; that is the completion of the Law through the utter dependence of faith; Jesus has faith in his Father, and does whatever is given him to accomplish; and that the world might know that this is so, the Father requires of Jesus *'obedience, even to death on the cross.'*

So it is written: *"I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."*

Indeed the story of the Gospels first and foremost is not that there were many who saw Jesus and believed; it is not that the disciples went out into all the world to preach the word of God; these are incidental. The Gospel first and foremost is the history of the only righteous man who ever lived, Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God. The Gospel is that Jesus loves the Father.

He alone gives himself to God; He alone hearkens to every word of His Father; indeed to Him alone is God a Father, and He alone is the Son of God. Just as it is written: *'thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.'* And so God spoke from the Jordan: *"This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

So he is the obedient Son. He bears the burden of the will of his Father, for he loves the Father. And to give proof of his utter love of God, it will be as the philosopher perhaps unknowingly foretold: He will be whipped, tormented, scourged, his eyes rent, and finally, having suffered every kind of evil, he will be crucified; all this, *and yet*

without sin.

So the Son has proven his love of the Father. So he has proven himself just before God; and so God has raised Him from the dead on the third day, that blessed Easter; for he is innocent, and no sentence of death shall be leveled against him. Christ, the Justified; and this Christ shall arise unto God; he shall ascend to the right hand of power, to God almighty, there to rule all things; set apart, set above the cosmos; Christ, the sanctified.

The story of the Gospels is fundamentally His story, not ours: it is the story of His birth, His baptism, His temptation, His ministry, His teaching, His miracles, His agony and bloody Passion, His crucifixion and death, His descent into hell, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven. Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Holy Easter, Holy Ascension, these are the days whereby we, mere mortals, recognize that Christ alone is the Just man, the Son of the Most High, whereby we confess with the demons that he alone is *'Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God!'*

And yet we are not numbered with the demons, nor are we any longer numbered among mortals, dear Christians; for one feast remains, a feast which is not Christ's alone, but one which is ours; or perhaps more correctly; it is the feast wherein all the feasts of Christ are made our own.

Remember how Our Lord promised us: *"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name."* And did you not hear of how Our Lord recalls his promises from the pen of St. Luke? *"And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting [...] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."* Just as it had been foretold many centuries before: *"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,*

that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Now it is the Feast of Pentecost, the giving of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ. On Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ is poured out upon all Flesh, and in the waters of the Church's Jordan, that font of regeneration, the Spirit is given to you. You were purged of darkness. Now take this burning torch. You were purged of death. Now bear eternal life. You were purged of yourself. Now you bear only the Spirit of Christ; *'for,'* it

is written, *'it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.'*

If you have Christ's Spirit within you, have you not been made one with him? Have you not been united to all his works? Have you not been

united to his faithfulness to the Father, to his righteousness, to his justice, to his crucifixion and resurrection; yes, we now are no longer mere

mortals, *'for if we having been united to a death like his in baptism,*

we certainly shall also be united to a resurrection like his.' For

remember what Our Lord taught: *'I am the vine, and you are branches,*

if you abide in me, I am in you.' We, being filled with the Spirit of Our Lord are

now made one with

everything that is his; as a bride which inherits all the possessions of the

bridegroom, so now we the Church inherit all the fullness of God in the Spirit,

that we too *'might be made partakers of the divine nature.'*

And not only is His life now your life, and His works your works; but now, even

now, His words have become your words. Gone is the confusion of so many words,

so many tongues wrought at Babel; Pentecost has now made ours the one

language of the words of Christ. Now the Spirit, Jesus tells us, brings to our

minds *'all that I have said to you.'* Now when tempted by the devil, by the Spirit,

yours are the words of Christ: *"Be gone Satan, for it is written, You shall worship*

the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."

Now when faced with every affliction, by the Spirit,

yours is the song of Christ: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation,*

of whom shall I fear?"

When your heart and nerve and sinew are tested to the

extreme, by the Spirit, yours is the prayer of Christ, *"Yet not my*

will, but thy will be done."

When the day of death comes, by the Spirit, yours will be

the comfort of Christ: *"If you love me, you would rejoice, for I am*

going to the Father."

Indeed, we have received the Spirit of Christ from the

hand of God, for God has heard the prayer of his Son: *"that they may*

all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be

in us."

John calls us *'little children'* and now we are indeed like little children, learning how to speak this new language, the Words of Christ, from our own lips. But this too will be *for but a time*. For Christ will *'bring to completion the good work begun in you.'* He will make this new language your native tongue.

The philosopher prayed to an *unknown god*, that a righteous man might appear, that mankind might be redeemed. This day, that prayer, spoken in ignorance, is now fulfilled in wisdom.

For behold, *'a great and magnificent day'* has come. *The spirit of the Lord is poured out*. And the *new wine* of holy blood shall fill all who will believe.

It is a *'great and magnificent day'*

'For all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

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