

Whitsunday (Pentecost)

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[0 : 0 0] With Sunday is the old English term describing the Feast of Pentecost, which is what we celebrate today.

! Pentecost, or With Sunday, is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God. It's 50 days after the day of Easter.

The word With Sunday comes from White Sunday, describing the white robes that would be worn for those who were to be baptized on this great feast.

I tell you this not to give you liturgical or church history trivia, but as insight to the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives, especially as it relates to Holy Baptism.

You see, there is much confusion today surrounding the Holy Spirit, but that's not anything new. Early on in the life of the church, there were those who taught that the Holy Spirit was a mere power or force, not an actual person of the Godhead.

[1 : 1 3] This controversy caused the church to call an ecumenical council, the Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Nicene Creed that we just confessed comes from this council of the universal and undivided church. We say in the original wording of that creed, Notice that we confess several things about the Holy Spirit.

First, this third person of the Holy Spirit here in the creed. First, this third person of the Holy Trinity is called He, which demonstrates He is a person, not a mere force or power.

Second, we say that like the Father and the Son, He is to be worshipped and glorified. This means that He, the Holy Spirit, is nothing less than God.

But the final point I want to make, and I want us to focus on this morning, is when we confess that the Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets, meaning the Holy Scriptures, and that His ministry is found in the one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

[2 : 5 3] The creed then speaks by saying that we believe in one baptism for the remission of sins. Friends, this sheds light on Pentecost and on Whitsunday.

As mentioned before, White Sunday is when people would wear white robes as they prepared to receive the Holy Spirit in holy baptism for the remission of their sins.

And you witnessed this last week with the baptism of little James Spears. But this helps with the confusion about the Holy Spirit as well.

The Holy Ghost is not some impersonal force or energy to channel. He is not some gut feeling that we have. He is a person whose ministry is intimately tied to the church, whereby we enter into communion with our God through the sacrament of holy baptism.

Why do I make such a big deal about this? Because there was another false teaching that the church had to combat, which it did in this second ecumenical council of 381.

[4 : 1 2] And that teaching was called Montanism. Now, Montanus was a self-proclaimed prophet. He was also very Gnostic.

The Gnostics were those who downplayed the physical. They only emphasized the spiritual or the unseen. In its most extreme form, Gnostics denied the physical ministry of the church by elevating personal or mystical experience over the physical and the primary sacraments of baptism in the Lord's Supper instituted by Jesus himself.

This was seen in the belief of new prophecies. The speaking of unknown or unintelligible murmurings called tongues.

These experiences were elevated over the scriptures, the creeds, or the sacraments of the church as some type of new revelation. The church condemned this false teaching because of its confusion and its schismatic offshoots that brought about deep divisions that divided, threatened the unity of the holy Catholic church, the universal church.

The elevation of certain prophets or bizarre behavior still goes on today. And it's seen as a repudiation of the clear voice, the real physical and tangible sacraments of the church.

[5 : 44] These new teachings sowed chaos and disorder rather than order. And it led people to act in very unstable ways.

It started little sects, little communities that rivaled the church's teaching, which had been passed down from our Lord to his apostles by the Holy Spirit in the one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

It also fed into a spiritual superiority complex, which was really rooted in hubris and pride in the church by those who believed that they were super Christians based on their own mystical experiences, ignoring the words of our Lord in Matthew chapter 16, verse 4, that says, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after signs and wonders.

Friends, God is seeking to order his creation. That's why we're here. That's our purpose in life is to order creation.

And we are engrafted into this order of the church that begins at holy baptism. We are called to continue to order our own lives by yielding to the Holy Spirit who uses the physical, the tangible, material elements of creation to transform us into a new creation through the ministry of the church that Christ established.

[7 : 16] The necessity of water, water, water, absolutely vital for life, is integral to what God has established for eternal life.

We are not to follow, nor are we to be promoting our own personal experience above what the church teaches, because that sows confusion and it brings disorder rather than order.

Therefore, when our Lord ascended back into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to comfort, to direct, to guide, so that we now love and obey his commandments.

As we have been brought into his body, the church. The church is not just some loose affiliation or association of like-minded believers.

It is the very body of Christ. In holy baptism, we receive the Holy Ghost so that despite how we might feel or what struggles we have, our Lord has not left us as orphans.

[8 : 30] We are sealed by God, by the Holy Ghost. God, the Holy Ghost. We have the Spirit living in us, constantly guiding us as we are now partakers and participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ here in the Eucharist.

As our collect of the day says for this Sunday that we just prayed together, we have received the light of the Holy Spirit, which happened in holy baptism, so that we might have right judgments, that is discernment, as we walk through this life submitting ourselves to Christ as members of his body, the one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

Dear friends, this is your great comfort and your hope throughout this life. You who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit living within you.

The Spirit leads you through the care and nurture of Mother Church. The church is where the Holy Spirit feeds and guides. The church instructs and calls you to continue to go deeper, to continue to grow, so that you might be a greater servant and witness to the love of God found in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And our Lord's promise here in our gospel text is that he will not forsake you. Even in death, we are not abandoned. We belong to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[10 : 04] And one day, as baptized Christians who walk the narrow road, following the cross of our Savior, Jesus Christ, seeking to live by his commandments, the Spirit will breathe life into our resting bones in the grave, where we shall be awakened and dwell with our God and all of his baptized children and saints in that great church triumphant.

Therefore, let us yield our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. Let us give ourselves to the word of God, feed upon God in the sacraments, and let us seek to walk in the commandments of God, so that we are his hands and feet as we seek to order our lives, our homes, our communities in the way of his truth and his love.

That is who you were created to be in holy baptism, where you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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