

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Prophet Joel spoke the Word of God to Israel 800 years before the birth of Christ. The people had forsaken the Word of God, they had fallen away. God sent Joel to foretell of a horrific attack by a merciless army, an army that would devastate Israel, an army of locust that came as a cloud of blackness on a day of darkness and gloom. It was for Israel a sign of the coming of the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment. As men were helpless when overwhelmed by dark clouds of locust, so too would men stand helpless on the Day of Judgment and Wrath.

“Put on sackcloth, O Priests and mourn; Wail, you who minister before the altar”, the Prophet warned the Priests who misled Israel with false teachings and corrupt doctrine. The Words of the same Prophet speak to us every Ash Wednesday: “Rend your heart, not your garments. Return to the Lord your God... spare your people, O Lord, do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations.”

Israel was overcome by merciless armies. The locusts came and devoured the land. The Assyrians came and sacked the northern kingdom and took the people into slavery. The Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem, and demolished the Temple of God. Israel was taken into slavery, and pagan people settled the Land once Promised to Israel.

But God, in His mercy, heard the prayers of His people. Although they were not faithful to Him, He was a faithful Husband to them. God gave to the same Prophet Words of Promise for His people: “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh... I will pour out my Spirit in those days, I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth...” God’s mercy would be shown not to Israel only, but to “all flesh”. God promised through faithful Joel, “Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.”

St. Luke records that Promised Day of Salvation, that Day of Deliverance, that Day when the Word of God spoken through the Prophet Joel was fulfilled: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from heaven...”

This time it was not a dark army of locust. It was not the Assyrian cohorts gleaming with silver and gold. It was not a ruinous Babylonian invasion. It was the promised outpouring of the Spirit of the Living God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son, the Spirit the Ascended Son sent from the Father.

On the Day of Pentecost, heaven invaded earth. It was an invasion of light and joy, an invasion of salvation, an invasion of mercy and love, a celestial in-breaking not to take men captive, but to free them from slavery to sin, and to open to them a new and better Promised Land, heaven. It brought to earth not destruction, but the new creation, the Spirit of God not again hovering over the face of the waters of the unformed and unfilled creation, but the Holy Spirit bringing the New Creation promised by God the Son, creating men anew by bringing to them the benefits of the cross and empty tomb.

In love, on Pentecost God reversed the curse of Babel, in which the tongues of men were confused as a result of their sin. Now men of many different tongues heard, in what was for

them know, modern languages, without interpreters, they heard of the wonderful works of God. They heard of the Holy Incarnation and Redeeming Work of Christ, His Precious Suffering and Death, His Victorious Resurrection to new life, and His Glorious Ascension into heaven. On the tenth day after His Ascension, the day of completion, the day of perfection, did the Spirit come.

The Spirit brings new life. The Spirit works and sustains faith, for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, the Word of Christ, the Word of the Wonderful Works of God. The Spirit descended from the very heaven to which God the Son ascended, just as He had promised.

Now the life He won is brought to men through the faith that the Spirit alone can give. The heavenly flames of fire lapped gently as the Spirit descended, not the consuming fire of the Day of Wrath, but deliverance from that wrath by the indwelling of the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Life. As the Lord promised, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to Him and make our home with Him."

The account of Pentecost is true. Like the rest of the Scriptures, it is a factual account kept error-free by the work of the Spirit through inspired authors. You can believe it, it happened just as St. Luke records. But the account of Pentecost is more than an historical fact. It is life and salvation for you.

For you cannot of your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ the Lord or come to Him. As sons of Adam, you are lost. You are captive to sin, slaves to transgression, overwhelmed by the locust swarm of temptation and left ruined, subjects of an evil conquering foe, captives of an evil ruler, the strong man of this world, victims of spirits more evil than the first, filled with sin that brings death.

But the Prophet bids you "rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God." Which invitation the same God, the God of love, makes possible by sending His Son to die for your sins, and to conquer death. And the Christ, God who took on your flesh and redeemed you body and soul, sent the Spirit of God from the Father to work faith in you, that you be created anew, that you be reconciled to God.

For the same Spirit that hovered over the waters in the darkness in the beginning, the same Spirit that descended and remained on the Christ at His baptism, the Spirit that descended and remained upon the Twelve, the same Holy Spirit comes to you, you who are baptized into the Triune Name.

And that Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His Gifts, and sanctifies you and keeps you in the true faith; even as 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 Church He daily and richly forgives you all your sins, and will at the Last Day raise up you and all the dead, and give to you and all believers in Christ eternal life.

The Lord promised "I will not leave you as orphans." He kept His Promise. The Spirit fills you, indwells you, brings the fulness of the Godhead into you, and sanctifies you, makes you holy. It is the restoration of the image of God lost in the fall: God fills you, God leads you to work and to

do the very things that please Him; He leads you to pray according to His will, and by His Spirit He keeps you steadfast in true faith unto life everlasting.

In that faith, faith worked by the Spirit, you receive the Word of Holy Absolution, and the forgiveness Christ won on the cross is yours. In that faith, faith worked by the Spirit, the righteousness of the risen Christ is declared to be yours. In that faith you worthily approach the Lord's Table, and eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ to your eternal benefit.

And in that faith, faith worked and sustained by the Spirit through the Means of Grace, God keeps you until the Day of the Lord, the Day of Salvation, the Day your Ascended Lord, the Lord who promised "I am going away and coming back to you", returns to take you home.

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