

**The Collect** O GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

**For the Epistle Acts 2:1-11** WHEN the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, where in we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome. Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

**The Gospel. St. John 14:15-31** JESUS said unto his disciples, If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world can not receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us. and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you be fore it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.

## *The Age of the Spirit of God*

Early in John's Gospel, from which our Gospel reading comes on this day of Pentecost, Jesus says something pivotal to the Samaritan woman at the well. He says: "Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Because the age in which we now live is the age of the spirit of God.

The Bible says that it is the spirit of the living God that is constantly brooding over the face of his creation. Thus when paradigm shift happens in our mind, we know that it is the work of the Holy Spirit. And when paradigm shift happens in our culture, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. And when there is a complete paradigm shift in the Church, sometimes the most stubborn of all institutions created by God, we are definitely watching the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you an example of this. I want you to think about the progression of what we know happened in the Church. We know, for example that even among the Gentile converts to Judaism, the proselytes were still not fully accepted in the Christian Church - there was still establishment discrimination. Luke records that very early on there was trouble even in the Jerusalem Church: the Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily distribution; the Jewish widows were not. It was shameful.

And so this is where the office of Deacon first emerges. The Apostles tell the people to elect men full of the Holy Ghost to sort out this problem and ensure that there is no discrimination. As we have mentioned before - all seven of these new Deacons, as they were called, have Greek speaking names. What an incredible, spiritual accomplishment for a Jewish organization!

The point that I want to make here is not now to illustrate how aggressively the Apostles moved to resolve this internal injustice. I really just want to point out something far more obvious. These Greek proselytes that became Deacons had been given the Holy Spirit. And some of them were full of it. Or rather of him.

Now consider what happened when the Apostles first hear that the despised, half-breed Jews in Samaria have received the Word of God too. How did *that* happen? How did Samaria get the Word of the Gospel? Who leaked it?, some might have asked. You must remember that many people in the Jerusalem Christian Church originally believed that the Gospel was for Jews only, not for Samaritan half-breeds. But how did the Samaritans receive the Gospel?

Remember Paul's persecution? It scattered the Church, except the Apostles. But Philip, a deacon, does not allow this to interfere with his mission strategy. For that matter, he does not let the fact that

he is but a mere Deacon interfere with preaching the Gospel. Instead of confining himself to the business of tables he decides to go and preach the word to the Samaritans.

What was the response of the Apostles to this? Philip has already gone and *baptized* these people in the name of Jesus Christ. What could they do? They have no choice. Either Philip is being grossly insubordinate or he is indeed filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has obviously orchestrated this, they decide. So they send Peter and John down to the Samaritans and lay their hands on them and they also receive the Holy Ghost.

*Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*<sup>1</sup> Even the great persecutor of the Messianic Jews, Saul, had been dramatically converted and neutralized by the command of Christ and the spirit of the living God. Peter had been making his Apostolic rounds, miraculously healing people at Lydda, at Saron, and Joppa, where he even revives a young girl who had recently died of some illness. And of course, many people in Joppa receive the word and believe because of this.

But the Holy Spirit moves yet again. Something truly astounding happens. Peter is staying with one Simon the Tanner and he goes up to the flat top of the house to pray at midday and he falls into a trance and receives a vision. Three times. And based on this vision the Holy Ghost directs Peter to go with the three envoys sent from Cornelius the Centurion who lives in nearby Caesarea.

Reluctantly, hesitatingly, Peter goes to the house of Cornelius the Centurion and preaches the word of God to everyone in the house. And even *as* Peter is repeating the particulars of what it is that the apostolic community believes – that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Ghost and with power, that God raised him up the third day, that he is now ordained to be the judge of the living and the dead, and that in him and him only there is remission of sins – the Holy Spirit indiscriminately falls on all those who believe. Without anyone's permission.

Remember, these are not Greek Proselytes. The main character here is a Roman Centurion. Everyone in the room who believes, the Holy Spirit falls upon them – and this is also without the imposition of Apostolic hands. And of course, Peter's whole entourage are messianic Jews and they are *astonished* that God would do this thing; that is, not discriminate between the Jews and Gentiles, but give the gift of the Holy Spirit directly to the Gentiles without the Jewish catechism - making them candidates for baptism in Jesus name and full members of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So you see, it wasn't God working through Paul who *first* initiated the process of integrating all the nations of the world into a universal; that is, one, holy catholic Church. It was God working through *Peter*. Peter's sermon in Cornelius' house confirms this. In this sermon Peter preaches that God is no respecter of persons or of nations – “but in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him.” But how could this happen – some of the early Jewish believers wonder? How could the non-Jewish nations suddenly be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven and the children of the Jewish establishment be so unceremoniously thrust out – as was made so painfully clear in Jesus' many formal condemnations of the religious establishment ?

It will take the rest of the apostolic age to understand the answer to these questions. In his epistles, John is to eventually explain why it was wrong to continue to call the Gentile nations common or unclean. This was accepted, settled tradition. But now Christ has died to take away the sins of the *whole* world. Not just the sins of the Jews. And not for any other special group. But for the whole world.<sup>2</sup> Mark adds: now *everything* is clean. Because of the work of Christ, there is nothing intrinsically unclean. This is a complete paradigm shift – not just for the Jews but for the whole world.

It was not only Peter and the rank and file Jew that had problems with God's indiscriminate behavior - the unrestricted flinging of the doors open to the Kingdom, without any entrance requirements except the blood of Christ. Paul had problems with this too.

As Peter told the story of his vision three times, so Paul told the story of his conversion three times. And each time we hear a little bit more about what Christ *specifically* told Paul to do: "he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

In the second telling of this story in Acts, Paul tells of a subsequent visit to the temple at Jerusalem. He too falls into a trance and Christ says to him then: "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." And before King Agrippa Paul expands this yet again – that Christ has made him a witness and will deliver him from persecution and from the Gentiles – *unto whom I now send thee*.<sup>3</sup>

And yet – as we have discussed - Paul does not go immediately to the Gentiles. He goes to the synagogue. Until city after city he is rejected, beaten, stoned and humiliated. And he finally realizes: *It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*.<sup>4</sup>

Peter and Paul both had much to learn and both made a difficult transition – from a parochial, insular religion to a universal religion and a universal Church and an universal, unrestricted missiology. Both of these men made a transition to a religion that was not based on that which was *physical* – but on that which was spiritual. A Church that was not based on a particular religious system but upon truth itself. A religion in which there was no more Jew, no more Greek, no more circumcision or uncircumcision, no more Barbarian or Scythian, no more male or female, no more plebe of patrician – or any political party. But one people, united by one baptism, one faith, one Lord, one body and one Spirit.

Now too there is no longer any physical Jerusalem. John says it. Paul says it. And Hebrews says it. And God confirmed it at the end of the apostolic age by destroying the Jerusalem that then was. The reason. The reason was not primarily apostasy this time. In John Jesus says this is a new day. A new era. It is the era of the Holy Spirit. You will no longer worship from Jerusalem. That physical city had only been a shadow of the heavenly Jerusalem which is the true mother of us all, Paul says. Now your worship comes directly from the Kingdom within, in which temple the Holy Spirit dwells.

And for that matter, there is no longer any physical Jew, since a Jew, [is that] which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.<sup>5</sup>

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. The prophet Joel said that it would happen like this – that the Holy Ghost would be spread abroad upon all people, not just the nation of the Jews: *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.*<sup>6</sup>

The veil has finally been taken away. Although there are those, Paul says, who still reject the universal church. Then too, Paul says, as Ishmael who was born after the flesh persecuted Isaac who was born after the spirit of promise; so too did the physical children of Abraham persecute the spiritual children of Abraham about which both Paul and John and Jesus spoke. And this is because *their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.*<sup>7</sup>

The veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. The Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the whole world has finally been revealed, yet crucified by his own people.

The Unknown God whom all the nations of the world ignorantly worshipped and YHWH, which the Jews consistently rejected - have been declared to be one and the same.

And the Holy Spirit of God, the spirit of truth itself, has been poured out upon all people to empower them to have a religion - not of cult or culture - but of truth. The Spirit now bears witness to each of our souls to that truth. And that truth is Christ. That's why he is called: the "spirit of truth."

This is the final age of revelation. This is the age of the Spirit of God. Now there is only one blasphemy. And that's to blaspheme the Spirit of truth himself<sup>8</sup> who lights up every man that has ever come into the world.<sup>9</sup> And there is only one way into the Kingdom of Heaven: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*<sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus tore down the temple veil, so the Holy spirit of truth tears down the veil of darkness in our own hearts. It is a baptism of fire. It will consume all ignorance and illuminate all knowledge of all truth. It is the Holy Spirit that bears witness to the truth and to the light and the life of Jesus Christ. For this is the age of the Holy Spirit of God. – *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:31

<sup>2</sup> 1 Jo 2:2

<sup>3</sup> Acts 26:17

<sup>4</sup> Acts 13:46

<sup>5</sup> Ro 2:29

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:17

<sup>7</sup> 2Co 3:14

<sup>8</sup> Mt 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

<sup>9</sup> Jo 1:9

<sup>10</sup> John 3:5-6