

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Day of Pentecost (2021)

Christ Manifests Himself to those Who Love Him:

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“Jesus answered him, “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. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:23–27, ESV)

In the Epistle Reading for today, St. Luke unfolds before our eyes the events of that first Christian Pentecost, saying, *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1–4, ESV)* Ever since this event, the people of Christ’s church have celebrated this day as the birthday of the Christian Church. But, in fact, the Church has existed since the beginning of the world. Since the Garden of Eden.

When in that garden Adam and Eve fell under the temptation of Satan and sinned, they brought sin into the world and through sin, death, and because of their sin they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. However, even though they had sinned against God, God did not abandon them. No, instead of leaving them hopeless, He gave them hope. He promised them a Savior, and it is through faith in the coming of that Savior that they became members of the Church. Thus, the Church has existed ever since that Gospel proclamation in the garden when God said, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15, ESV)* From the seed of the woman will come a Savior who will reconcile God with man. Thus, the Church is the assemblage of saints who, from the beginning, have believed that Gospel message, a Savior would come who will free them from the consequence of sin.

However, today, we celebrate the birthday of the Christian Church. After our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He did not abandon His Church, rather He fulfilled His promise, *“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7, ESV)* So, today, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today we celebrate that momentous day when Christ and God the Father sent the Holy Spirit, pouring Him out upon the disciples of Christ, all the members of His Church, just as He promised. But this begs the question, what is the Church? How do we identify her members, who is she, and what are her blessings?

These questions have been asked since her beginning. Time and time again men, confused by human reason, have misinterpreted the Word of God or out of a desire for self-glory, they refute the Word of God, teaching the corrupted word of man, while still thinking of themselves as members of His Church. Therefore, this morning, let us answer these questions.

How do we identify the members of the Christian Church? To begin with, Jesus says in the Gospel Reading for today, ***“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. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”*** (vv. 23-24) A member of Christ’s Church, a saint, is one who is given the gift of faith to believe in God’s only begotten Son for the forgiveness of their sin. A saint is one who loves Christ and who desires above all things to keep Christ’s words. A saint is one who is declared holy by God through faith alone, and only God can see this faith in the heart of a saint.

You and I, we are unable to see the faith of others, but we can recognize a true confession of faith. Jesus says a saint is one who, ***“will keep my word.”*** Faith comes from hearing His Word and it is this faith that leads one to keep His word and believe what His word says. Faith confesses that the words of the prophets and apostles are the inspired, inerrant, and infallible words of the Holy Spirit. Keeping Christ’s word means holding fast to it as a guide for sanctified living, it means to cherish it and its promises of salvation offered in the Gospel, that saving word of Christ. So, yes, we recognize faith through the confessions of men.

Although we cannot see faith, we can see its denial. Again, Jesus says, ***“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me”*** (v. 24) Thus, whatever Jesus speaks is also what God speaks. To deny the words of Christ is to deny God’s Word. All too often we see this in what is loosely called the Christian church. Men, driven by a desire for fame and glory or by the wiliness of Satan, misinterpret the word of Christ, creating false pieties, false teachings, and false doctrines which deny Christ and lead people away from the true Church and into sects or worldly living. But true faith holds firmly to the Word of God, firmly to what Christ says. Indeed, if you love Christ, you will hold steadfast to His Word for His Word shows you, His love. It is faith alone, faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Altar of the Cross, which makes one a member of the Christian Church, and it is confession alone that marks one as a member of the Christian Church. Being faithful to the Word of God, in every article of His Word, makes one a true member of His Church.

The second question is how do we identify the Christian Church herself? St. Paul answers this question in his letter to the Ephesians, saying, ***“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism,”*** (Ephesians 4:4–5, ESV) This is the *Una Sancta*, the one Body of Christ. The Church is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. However, complying with this standard is beyond human ability, it requires divine assistance. It requires the Holy Spirit who makes the Church what she is. Jesus said, ***“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”*** (vv. 25-26)

Where the Gospel is preached in its purity and where the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel, there is the Church, the true Church, the Christian Church of Pentecost. Where these are not the case, you will not find the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not call, gather, enlighten, or sanctify by means of false teachings, human opinion, legal impositions, or emotional manipulations. Instead, the Holy Spirit teaches what Christ has taught, what Christ has said. The Church is to be found in no other place than in the teachings of Christ.

What does our Lord say to His apostles’? He says that the Holy Spirit, ***“will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”*** (v. 26) After that first Christian Pentecost, the apostles went forth into the world, fortified and reminded by the Holy

Spirit to teach and to write all that Christ had taught them. All they did was inspired and led by the Holy Spirit and look at the results; a world brought to Christ and the saving message of the Gospel. But this same, divine Church has been under constant attack by Satan ever since her beginning.

As the apostles went out with the truth of the Gospel they were opposed at every turn. Satan was adamant, the Gospel must be stopped by any means possible. Thus, as the years went by false doctrines abounded from every conceivable corner of what was called the Church. Many of these were soundly refuted and defeated, but not all. Throughout the centuries of the Church false doctrine and false teachers popped up everywhere. Then, in the sixteenth century God raised up a man and filled him with the Holy Spirit so that he became the impetuous for what may well be called a Pentecost like event, the Reformation. Inspired by the Holy Spirit to rightly understand the Gospel, Luther's unwavering faith in Christ returned the Church to her rightful Master, the crucified One, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ that by faith in His life, death, and resurrection sins would be forgiven and souls would be saved.

The Church had lapsed into one error on top of another. Wolves in sheep clothing had taken control and false teaching abounded. But God, in His mercy, gave the sainted Dr. Martin Luther the precious gift of faith. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Martin Luther reminded the people of Christ's Church just what was true and what was false teaching and false worship. Therefore, out of God's merciful love the Church was rescued and brought back to her true roots, the blessed Word of the Gospel in all its truth and purity and the joyful reception of the holy Sacraments according to Christ's command. Moreover, through the Small and Large Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession, God's people were reminded of and taught the truth of God's Word. And through the Formula of Concord, man's errors regarding the teaching of God's Word were rightly rebuked. All this was done to remind the world that the true Church is identified by her true teaching, teaching that does not change with the times.

Lastly, how do we identify the blessings of the Church? In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus says, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*** (v. 27)

The peace that Jesus gives is different than the peace of the world. Worldly peace is temporary at best, but the peace of Christ lasts forever. The peace the world gives is imperfect peace, but the peace of Christ removes all conflict. The peace of the world depends on the law and those who keep the law, but the peace that Christ gives is founded solely on the Gospel.

The peace granted by the law requires obedience to the law. However, if we think we can fulfill the Law of God, we are sadly mistaken. Our flesh, the world, and Satan do all they can to ensure that we become transgressors of the Law. Therefore, no peace can be found in the Law. But Christ's peace is a peace that comes from His fulfillment of the Law. It is a peace which comes at the cost of His life. A peace agreement signed with our Lord's precious blood.

Yes, we have peace with Christ because He says we have peace with Him. He says, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."*** This is a peace which says Christ has overcome the world, sin, and Satan. He proclaims our forgiveness not because of our works of satisfaction, but solely because of His gracious and merciful atoning sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross which brought us peace with Him (John 16:33). St. Paul reminds us, ***"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you***

who were far off and peace to those who were near.” (Ephesians 2:14–17, ESV) Furthermore, he also says, “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, ESV) Where the true Gospel of peace is proclaimed, believed, and confessed, there Christians live in harmony.

The peace of Pentecost and the peace of the Reformation is given to all to whom *Christ Manifests Himself through the Gospel of Peace*. It is given to those *Who Love Him* because He loved them first. Therefore, on this blessed Pentecost Sunday, give thanks to our merciful and gracious God who poured out the Holy Spirit upon you through the waters of Baptism and thereby made you a child of His so you may be at peace with Him, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.