

## “The Holy Spirit Gives Unity in the Church”

(Acts 2:37-47 – Pentecost – June 8, 2025)

*Acts 2:37-47 – <sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup>Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” <sup>40</sup>And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” <sup>41</sup>Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. <sup>42</sup>And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup>Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup>and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup>So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

Dear Redeemed of God who have been given saving faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit:

Today we are gathered as a joint parish to worship together, eat together, and meet together. We are three congregations united in worship and work. Who has united us? From outward appearances, it may seem that our Christian unity is based on human arrangement, as if we brought ourselves together; and this would imply that it will depend on our strength and resources to keep us together.

But as we will contemplate on this Pentecost Sunday, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us together. As it was in the early Church, so it is today: **“The Holy Spirit Gives Unity in the Church”**: **1) He converts sinners to saving faith, 2) He unites believers in faithful fellowship.**

### **1) He converts sinners to saving faith**

Before Jesus’ ascension, He promised His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit from the Father, who would remind them of all He had said. The Spirit would guide them into all truth and give them a right understanding of how Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures in His life, death, and resurrection. As the apostles bore witness to Jesus, the Holy Spirit Himself would bear witness through their message. The Holy Spirit would convict and convert sinners to saving faith (John 14:26; 15:26-16:15).

This is what we see on that first Pentecost. As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples with the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and with what appeared to be tongues of fire coming to rest on each of them. They were given the miraculous ability to speak in tongues, languages they had not known, of people from every nation who were gathered at Jerusalem for the harvest festival (Acts 2:1-11). Then as an astonished crowd gathered at the sound, Peter began to preach to them; and the Holy Spirit worked through his witness to bring a harvest of souls.

What was the message the Holy Spirit used? First, it was the Law of God that convicted sinners of their guilt. Peter showed the people that they had crucified Jesus Christ, their very Messiah! They were guilty of the blood of God's Son! But God had raised Him from the dead as the Savior of sinners. And it was this risen Lord Jesus, now exalted at His Father's right hand, who poured out the Holy Spirit with power as they saw. As we come to our text, it says: "*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'*" The Holy Spirit had done His necessary work of convicting sinners of their guilt and showing them their desperate need to be saved from God's judgment.

But now, the Holy Spirit continued His work in converting sinners to saving faith by the Gospel: "*Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'*" As Peter preached forgiveness in Jesus' name, the Holy Spirit gave the joyful results: "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*"

The same Spirit has convicted and converted each of us, calling us to saving faith, bringing us into Christ's Church. Through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit shows us that it was our own sins that caused Jesus to be crucified. The innocent Son of God died because of our impure and evil thoughts; He died because of our unloving and hurtful words; He died for our selfish and harmful deeds. The Law cuts to the heart as it shows us our sin and the judgment we deserve. If Jesus had not suffered and died for us, we would have been cut off from fellowship with God and one another in eternal death.

But the Gospel comforts our hearts as it shows us our Savior. It reveals that while we were sinners, God loved us and sent His Son to the cross to die for us (Romans 5:8). It declares that through Jesus' innocent sacrifice, God forgives all our sins; and through Jesus' perfect life, God counts us perfect. By the Gospel, the Holy Spirit created in our hearts saving faith in Jesus. In Baptism, God gave us "*the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*" giving us the new birth as His children (Titus 3:5-6; John 3:5).

So by the grace of God and the work of His Spirit, we were converted to saving faith and brought into the one Church of all believers. We enjoy fellowship with God and one another in Christ, as Ephesians 4:4-6 says: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

## **2) He unites believers in faithful fellowship**

So the Holy Spirit gives unity in the Church, first, by converting sinners to saving faith in Jesus. But He does not stop there. As we see in our text, the Holy Spirit continues to unite believers in faithful fellowship. From that first Day of Pentecost, as the Church grew to a few thousand souls, it says: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

As Jesus had promised His apostles, the Holy Spirit guided them into all truth. The Spirit gave them full understanding of how Jesus fulfilled all that the prophets had written in the Old Testament Scriptures; and the Spirit would reveal things to come, inspiring them to write the New Testament Scriptures. So as the believers continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching, the Holy Spirit united them in the Word of God. In true fellowship, they believed and confessed God’s truth with one mind and spirit. They expressed this unity by gathering regularly in worship around God’s Word and Sacraments. The breaking of bread included communing together in the Lord’s Supper. They joined their hearts in prayer, united in saying “Amen” together.

From this basis of true unity in God’s Word and worship, we also see the fruit of the Holy Spirit as the believers expressed fellowship in daily life and work together. It says: *“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”* Knowing God’s great love and generosity in giving His Son to win eternal life and riches for them, they wanted to share that same love and generosity with one another. The Holy Spirit produced this fruit of faith in them. As members of the Body of Christ, they used the gifts the Spirit gave them to serve for the common good and build one another up in the faith (1 Corinthians 12:4 ff). As stewards of God’s grace, they combined their offerings and resources to support the Gospel mission and to reach out and share with those in need.

Today, the Holy Spirit unites us in the same faithful fellowship. We express true Spirit-given unity, first, as we continue steadfastly in God’s pure Word and Sacraments. By these means of grace, the Spirit strengthens us our faith in Jesus and our love for one another. As members of the Body of Christ, He gives each of us spiritual gifts to serve for the common good, to build one another up in faith. He moves us to join our

hearts and hands in worship and work, combining our offerings and resources to support the Gospel mission and share with those in need. In this unity, He blesses our congregations and joint parish, our synod and worldwide fellowship.

But Satan, the world, and our sinful nature work against such God-given unity. Soon in the early Church, Satan would bring temptations and threats against believers to give up faithfulness to God's Word. False teachers would introduce teachings that divide and destroy faith. The world around them would bring persecution and pressure to give up true faith and conform to society. We feel similar things today, as many church bodies give up faithfulness to Scripture and embrace modern thinking. We feel pressure to compromise and conform to the world. But we cannot express true fellowship of the Holy Spirit with those who teach and practice against His Word. We cannot join hands and say "Amen" together with falsehood. Faithful Christian fellowship and unity means that we speak God's truth in love, because we care for souls.

In addition, our sinful nature tempts us to break the unity the Holy Spirit wants to give us in Christian love. Sometimes we let bitterness divide, instead of forgiving one another as God forgave us in Christ. Or we let human opinions and cliques divide, instead of seeing ourselves as members of one Body in Christ. When it comes to the gifts and abilities God gives us, we are tempted to use them selfishly instead of as stewards of God's grace, giving and serving to His glory and for one another's good.

But despite the temptations of Satan, the world, and our sinful nature, God's Spirit graciously continues to give us true unity in the Church the way He always has. By the truth of His Law, He convicts and cuts us to the heart that we might rightly see our sin. He brings us in daily repentance to our Baptism, where we drown the sinful nature and die to ourselves. The Spirit raises us up in Jesus' cleansing to walk in newness of life, having our faith renewed in His Gospel of forgiveness. The Spirit leads us to true unity in God's Word and Sacraments, to join our hearts and hands in joyful worship and work, to use our gifts in love as we serve one another and share the Gospel with others.

The account concludes this way with believers *"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."* As they continued faithfully in God's Word, sharing His Gospel of salvation for sinners in Jesus, the Holy Spirit brought more souls to saving faith and eternal life. On this Pentecost Day, we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to give us such true unity and bless our fellowship. As we share Jesus' Gospel, we pray that He will work His increase among us, strengthening our faith and adding to the Church those who are being saved.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.