

Believe in the Holy Spirit (Lord's Day 20)

Readings: John 16:5-16; Acts 2: 1-13

Over the past few weeks we have been speaking about the ascension of our Lord into heaven and the effects of that ascension on us today.

Lord's Day 18: Christ's ascension means that He intercedes before the Father, acts as lawyer in heaven on our behalf, so that we can pray openly and boldly.

Lord's Day 19: Christ's ascension means that He rules all the world for the sake of the church – and so we today need not be alarmed at the developments of world history, for our Savior has all things firmly in His control.

So we understand it is to our advantage that Christ ascended into heaven.

But does that mean that Jesus has just left us to fend for ourselves down here on earth?

The answer, of course, is No.

In John 16 Jesus promises to send the helper/Holy Spirit to guide his people...

This is picked up in Lord's Day 20

Notice that in the Apostles' Creed there is only one question and answer concerning the Holy Spirit.

There is one Lord's Day after the other about Jesus Christ, but there is only one question and answer concerning the Spirit.

Does this mean that the writers of the Catechism were unconcerned with the person and work of the Holy Spirit?

I mean, if we were writing the Catechism today...wouldn't we include so much more about the HS?

Of Course, the answer is 'No!'

They see the work of the Spirit played out in the life of the church and people of God.

Thoughts expanded in the rest of the catechism.

Just think about these questions:

"Why do you believe the Bible is God's Word when others don't?"

"Why do you believe Jesus is God and Savior?"

"Why do you repent and believe?"

"Where do you get the strength to live the Christian life?"

"What unites you to Christ's body, the church?"

"How come you are able to grow in the faith through the Word, sacraments, prayer, and fellowship?"

"What makes you a witness to Christ?"

The answer has to do with the Spirit...

Without the Spirit none of this is possible.

The Spirit is vital, the Spirit is crucial, in the life of the church.

Notice in the first place, His Person...who is the Holy Spirit?

Secondly, that He is given to me;
and finally, also His benefits to me.

Who the Spirit Is

"I believe in the Holy Spirit," says the Creed we confess.

Who is the Spirit?

The Bible's answer: "He, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God."

In other words, He is part of the triune Godhead, the third person of the Holy Trinity.

Look at texts mentioned in our Lord's Day. Gen 1:1,2:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

The point is to show that the Spirit was involved in creating the world.

Yet only God can create; no creature can fashion the world.
That is: the Spirit is true God, Creator.

Mt 28:19:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are mentioned here on a level.

That is: whatever is to be said here of the Father and the Son is to be said also of the Holy Spirit.

As the one is God, so the other is God.

So too Acts 5:3,4:

"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ... You have not lied to men but to God.'"

Here Peter simply calls the Holy Spirit 'God'.

Who is the Spirit our exalted Savior sent to earth?

The Holy Spirit is not a power, not an 'it'; the Holy Spirit is a Person, true God, "He".

In many places the Bible recognizes the personhood of the Spirit.

He does, feels, and experiences things that only persons can do, feel, and experience.

For instance, "He gives" and "He determines" (1 Cor 12:11).

We can "grieve" Him (Eph 4:30), which means to cause Him personal pain.

We can lie against the Spirit, which is lying against God (Acts 5:3,4).

It is possible for people to commit "sin and blasphemy" against the Spirit (Mt 12:31).

From eternity He has been one God with the Father and the Son, in no way less than the Father and the Son.

So when Christ ascended into heaven He directly sent this Third Person of the holy Trinity *out of heaven again*, directly poured out His Holy Spirit upon the earth – Pentecost. Why He did so?

Jesus promised His disciples a "Helper", the Holy Spirit – true and eternal God.

What does this mean in our life today?

It means that if anyone claims to know God, that person should also know the Holy Spirit. You see, we know God as a three-fold fullness.

First, we should know Him as the God-above-us: the Creator, the Sovereign Lord, the Law-giver, the Father.

Second, we should know Him as the God-for-us: the Mediator, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Son.

And **third**, we should know Him as the God-in-us: the Sanctifier, the Renewer, the Spirit.

To know God is to know Him in all His fullness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To know God is to also know, worship, love, and adore Him as Spirit.

We need to realize the intimate connection between Christ and the Spirit.

Already in the Old Testament we see this connection.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD ... (Is 11:1-2)

As you know, Christ did not start His earthly ministry until He was baptized with the Spirit (Lk 3:22) and it was only in the power of the Spirit that Jesus did His earthly ministry (cf Luke 4:18,19; cf Isaiah 61:1,2)

But Jesus is not only the bearer of the Holy Spirit; He is also the giver of the Holy Spirit.

It is the ascended Christ seated at the right hand of God Who pours out the Spirit upon the church (Acts 2). The Apostle Peter makes this point in his Pentecost day speech to the crowds of people:

‘Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.’ (Acts 2:33)

We come to our second point:

2. The Work of the Holy Spirit.

With the church of all ages we not only confess Who the Spirit is, but we also confess what He does.

Based upon Scripture, this is what the second part of the Catechism's answer deals with:

Second, he has been given to me personally,
so that, by true faith,
he makes me share in Christ and all his
blessings,
comforts me,
and remains with me forever.

A key word here is "faith." Faith, of course, is a work of the Holy Spirit.

To confess this is to confess that by true faith the Holy Spirit has been "given to me personally."

What an astounding statement.

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the godhead, has been given to me personally.

(1 Cor 6:19) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

The Lord Jesus Christ has sent His Spirit not to stand *between* the rebels and us,
nor to fight *beside* us in the battles of faith;
the Lord has sent His Spirit instead to *dwell within* us.

It's a thought beyond comprehension, but true nevertheless: true and eternal God, the Holy Spirit, has made His home in us, dwells in us!

God the Son ascended into heaven, but God the Holy Spirit descended from heaven; God the Son is busy in heaven for our benefit, but God the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts for our benefit!

This is the gospel of Immanuel, God-with-us: true and eternal God dwells in human hearts.

To be temples of the Holy Spirit: what in all the world equals that in privilege!!

But notice what the Holy Spirit does.

Just as Jesus did not draw attention to Himself but set out to glorify the Father,
so the Spirit glorifies the name of Christ.

The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself;
He dwells in our hearts in order to draw our attention time and again to Jesus Christ.

So the question is not: do you have the Holy Spirit?
The question is rather: do you believe in Jesus Christ?

It is always Christ whom the Spirit puts center-stage,
He who paid for sin and defeated Satan
and now labors in heaven for the benefit of His people,
and even poured out His Holy Spirit to help His people.

The Spirit directs our attention all the time to Jesus Christ and His work.

He's like the floodlight that lights up a building.
A floodlight doesn't draw attention to itself, but wants passersby to notice the building on
which it shines.

The Spirit always points away from Himself and to Christ, as is evident already at Pentecost.
On that day, filled with the poured-out Spirit, Peter and the other disciples did not explain
Who the Spirit is, but Who Jesus is.

Notice what the Holy Spirit does by or through the faith He gives us:
He connects us with Jesus Christ just as an electrical cord connects a lamp with a source of
light and power. By or through faith the Holy Spirit "makes me share in Christ and all His
blessings."

This Spirit, when he comes, works a change. How far does the change go?
To help understand the extent of the change, you need only to look to the people of Jerusalem
in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a day when the people of Jerusalem came together, and they all cried out with one
voice, Away with this man! They didn't say it once, they kept on shouting, crucify him,
crucify him!

When the authorities challenged them to explain what crime this man had committed, they
insisted all the more that He be crucified.

And you know what happened.

Pilate gave in and handed Jesus over for crucifixion.

The point is that these people of Jerusalem had murder in their minds.

Then in Acts 2 you get the sermon that Peter preached a full seven weeks, 50 days, after the people of Jerusalem cried out to Crucify, Crucify this innocent Jesus of Nazareth.

What was the response of the people of Jerusalem to Peter's preaching?

We read the response in verse 37, "When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and they said "brothers what shall we do" and Peter said, "Repent".

The result is that many of them did!

According to v41, some 3000 accepted his message and were baptized, 3000 people of Jerusalem, and many of those were the people who stood before Pilate and cried out to Crucify, Crucify!

But what do they do now?

We read together the verses 42 and following, how it was that this crowd of 3000 was together, and they studied Scripture, they prayed, broke bread – an action that symbolized the value of the death of the man they called out to crucify.

You see something of the change at work there?

They believe, and not only that, verse 45, "they sold their possessions and goods and they gave as anyone had need".

Seven weeks ago they were crying out for murder, and now they are happy to give, to share!

What a change!

Seven weeks ago there was love for self,
and now there is self denial, they sell, they give.

How come the change?

We understand, this is Acts 2, the **Spirit** has been poured out.

Please notice the verb the apostle uses here, the Spirit has been **poured** out, He has not been sprinkled,

He has not been dripped out.

The term **poured** out calls to mind the picture of a pail of water that is poured out on top of you.

This is not in small measure, but you are soaked.

The Spirit is poured out and the result is **change**, radical **change**, because Holy **God** makes His home in sinful hearts.

So we have looked at who the Holy Spirit is and what he does, but...

Finally, what are the benefits of having the Spirit?

The Spirit makes me share in Christ and all His blessings.

What are these blessings?

The Catechism mentions comfort – the comfort of belonging to Jesus.

The Catechism mentions His presence with me forever – so that I am never alone and never forsaken.

But following questions and answers in the HC, based upon the Bible, tell us about other blessings:

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that "I am and always will be a living member" of the holy catholic church (54)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I am gifted for service in the church and kingdom (55)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that God "will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature" (56)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I have the comfort of knowing that death is not the end for me and that someday my body will be raised from the grave and reunited with my soul (57)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I have the comfort of life everlasting (58)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I am able to produce fruits of gratitude (64)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I am fed with the Word and Sacraments (65)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I become dead to sin and alive to righteousness (70)

It is only because the Holy Spirit, by faith, unites me to Christ that I can make a small beginning in obeying God's commandments (114)

Wow. What a lot of blessings. And, this list is by no means exhaustive.

Conclusion

"I believe in the Holy Spirit," says the Creed of the church. I believe he, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God.

I believe
he has been given to me personally,
so that, by true faith,
he makes me share in Christ and all his
blessings,
comforts me,
and remains with me forever.