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The Day of Pentecost
and Rite of First Communion
May 30 & 31, 2020
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City
John 7:37-39

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” The Jews knew plenty about thirst. This festival was the Feast of Tabernacles, in which for eight days they set up tents around Jerusalem and remembered their wanderings in the desert, how the Lord had given them water from the rock and manna and quail to eat, sustaining them till they reached the land of plenty. Seasonally, they celebrated this festival in the fall, which in Israel’s climate likely hadn’t seen rain since last spring. The land was thirsty, and on this last high feast day, they would take a pitcher of water from the pool of Siloam and process it into the temple and pour the water out on the altar, praying for rain from heaven. But it also was a festival which had Messianic implications. They still thirsted for the fulfillment of God’s Word in the coming of the Messiah.

Yet often the rumblings in our stomachs for earthly needs are louder and stronger than our desire for the Savior. In our Old Testament reading, the Israelites had a craving. They were sick of the Lord’s wilderness manna and longing to return to the good old days of slavery, when they had meat to eat. But they had no thirst for the salvation of God, no desire to see the covenant of God fulfilled. So, God said, “I’ll fill you all right. I’ll stuff you so much with meat that it will be coming out your nose!” But what they really needed was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Moses, in the other hand, sought the Lord. He knew he could not bear the burden of Israel’s sins or fulfill their desires. He knew the wretchedness of His flesh, his inability to carry out his

office. He said that if this burden would continue, he'd rather die. And the Lord answered by giving His Spirit to the 70 elders to preach the Lord's repentance and salvation, so that everyone with thirst for the Lord would be filled and find true satisfaction and comfort.

Everyone who knows the thirst of guilt will understand where Moses was coming from. We have times where we have terribly fallen short of the callings God has given us as husbands and wives, parents, children and siblings, in our jobs and in our communities. When we look at our abilities and shortcomings, we feel that our responsibilities are too much for us to handle, to do any good, and we are burdened with guilt.

When you have guilt, the sun could be shining, but your mind will be darkened and cloudy. You might have wealth or family or friends, but they will bring you no pleasure. Guilt weighs on the mind and body and spirit so much, that it would be better to die than to live in such distress and despair. People will try to comfort you with the law. They will try to convince you that you are really a good person, or that your sins are really small and understandable, or that you should be happy with who you are or what you have, or that you just need to forgive yourself or accept yourself. But this will only increase the misery of a guilty heart, since in every instance you will see that your sins remain with you. A stricken conscience can only find peace in the forgiveness of sins.

The people of Jesus' day longed for the Christ to come. But instead of anchoring their hope in God's promises, the Pharisees and Sadducees only burdened them with laws. And they couldn't fulfill these manmade laws, let alone God's holy law. To these thirsty souls, Christ offered

comforting words, “Come to me and drink of My Holy Spirit. He will flow like a river to you with My gift of salvation in the forgiveness of sins. My grace will so comfort your souls and give you joy that it will pour out of you to others as well so that everyone would have my love.”

I do, at this point, want to fix a translation in our Gospel lesson, the verse that reads, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” The Greek actually uses the word “Koiliias” for belly, so that the verse should read, “Out of his *belly* will flow rivers of living water.” It is, after all, the belly that needs to be filled. This verse reminds us that Christ, in his humiliation, refused to be filled with the praise of man, money and possessions, and bodily comforts. Our Lord fasted in the wilderness and emptied Himself upon the cross, in order that He would overflow with salvation. Jesus’ desire was only for the will of God, so that on the cross His cracked and bleeding lips would not be quenched by the gall offered by the soldiers, but by the words, “It is finished.” With these words the Scripture was fulfilled and Christ was glorified, having completed God’s atoning work for our sins. And so it was then, after Jesus’ death, that His belly was pierced and out came a river of blood and water, indicating the well of salvation was now full and overflowing with gifts of the Spirit for you.

Knowing this helps us understand what the Scripture means by saying, “as yet the Spirit had not been given.” You might wonder how that could be, since the Spirit was clearly with Moses and the seventy elders, with the prophets, and later Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon at the time of Jesus’ birth. The Spirit’s work is to reveal and glorify Christ. Before, it had been done by prophesying about Him. But the plan of salvation through Jesus’ incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection was not yet known. Thus, the Spirit’s work wasn’t in full force then. After Christ

was glorified on the cross, having become the Savior of mankind, the Holy Spirit was sent to bring people to Jesus Christ, now revealed in the Gospel, so that they would receive the salvation He has won. In this way, the Spirit had not fully been given, though the Spirit of the Old and New Testaments is the same Spirit.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, so that we know that when we receive the Spirit, we are ever connected to Christ and His gifts. And in receiving Christ, we are also brought to our heavenly Father. And if we have the fullness of our Triune God, what do we lack? Nothing.

We have three youths this week who to thirst for the Sacrament of the Altar. Through the Ten Commandments they have come to know the depravity of their sinful flesh, how they continually need God's grace or else they would fail to receive His glory. They know the emptiness of their works and life with out the Holy Spirit and they know the forgiveness of sins which Christ won for them. They have already been filled with this grace in their baptism and through the teaching of the Word. One would think that this is enough. They already have the Spirit; why the need for this Supper?

Because they live in a world that continues to try to fill them with the wrong things. Our culture teaches youth to prioritize sports or grades or material things over God's saving gifts. Salons are more essential than sacraments. They learn to desire success, pleasure, and the glory of man more than the glory of God. Our youth have the sexual revolution constantly shoved down their

throats. And they all suffer the baggage of this world's and their own sins within their families, schools, and communities. In such a world, can one ever have enough of the forgiveness of sins?

In this Sacrament they actually eat and drink of Christ Himself. His holy body and blood fills their stomachs, so that they would always have consolation in the forgiveness of sins and know that their life is secure in God who has granted that they live with Him eternally. They can live in this comfort, that God's well of salvation abundantly overflows for them, in their Baptism, in the Word, in Holy Absolution, and in Holy Communion. Through these gifts the Spirit overwhelms them with such grace and mercy that the world, the devil, and their sinful nature cannot do anything to drain them of their hope in God or love outpoured for their neighbor.

There is nothing more miserable and debilitating than the guilt of sin, and there is nothing more freeing, satisfying, and invigorating than the forgiveness of sins. The more we are filled with it, the lighter our load. Although we still have our weaknesses, the Spirit covers us with Christ's righteousness so that we are holy in God's eyes and valuable to our neighbor. For we know that the well of God's grace cannot be contained. It is a river of living water which the Spirit pours out of us so that much good comes to our families, places of business, communities, and congregation. With the forgiveness of sins the sun shines brightly again and we are free to enjoy God's love in all of the ways it is shown to us.

This is my prayer for our catechumens and for you and for everyone who thirsts. The grace of God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.