

## WHITSUNDAY-IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS

Text-St. John 14:15, Acts 2:1

On this wonderful day of Pentecost, I bring you greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who looks into our hearts and says to each of us, "If you love me, keep my commandments." AMEN

Today is the birthday celebration of the church. As we heard in Acts, fire came from heaven and the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost. They spoke in tongues, they spoke of the wonderful works of God and all around, people of every nation, every nationality, every province heard them and understood their words. People who had never understood before the full depth of God's love finally could hear in their own languages the wonder of a loving God and heard the words of hope, and salvation and the promise of things to come.

These simple men who had been with our Lord for the life of His ministry now possessed all they would need to comprehend the full measure of God's message. They suddenly knew what they had to do and filled with the Holy Ghost, they became passionate about spreading the Gospel. Their greatest desire in life was to share Christ's love, tell everyone about Christ and bring His message to all, no matter what the cost to them personally. Nothing would stop them, not the Romans or the Jews, not the devil himself for God through the Holy Spirit was in each in every one of them and they would go to all parts of the empire and carry Christ's message to Jew and Gentile alike, planting the seeds of faith that would grow into a church that today is some two billion strong.

They spread the word of God one person at a time, through individual conversions, by preaching and Baptizing one person at a time, imparting the Holy Spirit into them, just as it was imparted to us in our own Baptism. That is the true connection we have to those first disciples and to our God for just as the Holy Spirit was imparted to them on the first day of the church, it was imparted to each of us in the pouring of water on us, in the invoking of the name of our triune God as the water ran over us, in the flame that is ignited in us through that Baptism.

I have had the good fortune to Baptize three people so far in my short ministry. Every one of those was a moving experience. Two were children and the joy that comes in welcoming a new child into God's kingdom is remarkable knowing that the simple act you are performing starts them on the road to eternal life with our Lord. But even more remarkable was the adult I Baptized. This person had heard the word of God, heard of Christ's love, heard the promise of eternal life, heard about the all loving God who never turns from us, who is always there for us and who wants us in His eternal kingdom with Him. She came to me, moved by the Holy Spirit and said "I want to be baptized" and I was filled with joy as I heard her commit herself to God in the promises of the Baptismal service. This child of God had made her own decision, like the early Christians, and came forward to join God's family. I have never known moments in my life more fulfilling and I thanked God for the opportunity to welcome all of them into His kingdom. It made me think of my own Godfather who when he went to the Lord at nearly 100, had registered the name of every person he had baptized in his life as a minister in his bible. Over 1,000 names filled the leafs of his bible. Imagine 1,000 lives started on the road to salvation.

And yet, be it 1 or 1,000, every person is of value to God and the angels rejoice at the conversion of one sinner. The sharing of God's love can be a life changing experience. It can mean the difference between eternal life and eternal suffering for someone who is hungry for hope in their life. That is why our Lord imparted the Holy spirit to His disciples on the day of Pentecost, that is why He left them the comforter to give them strength of conviction, that is why each of us carries the Holy Spirit within us. Not to hide under a basket but to let shine so the whole world can see.

"If you love me keep my commandments!" What are His commandments? "You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the profits."

I love the Gospel of John because it gives us the greatest insights in the divinity of Christ. Look at all the wonderful things the Lord says to us in that Gospel.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“Whoever drinks the water I will give him shall never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become the in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never go thirsty.”

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

But also in His teachings are those things that each of us must hear to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.

“I tell you the truth, unless a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

“True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the father seeks.”

“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

“The work of God is to believe in Him who He has sent.”

“I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.”

And what He says to us in Matthew-“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Our commitment to Christ must be real for the Lord knows our hearts. It goes beyond coming to church once a week, or working at the food kitchen or presenting generous offerings of time and resources for the work of the church. Our commitment must be motivated by true love for Him expressed by the light of Christ shining in each of us. It is expressed in the kindness we show each other, it is expressed by sharing the message of Christ with those we know and with strangers alike. It is expressed in our daily prayers and conversations with God. It is expressed in our daily study of scripture. It is expressed in our desire to glorify God in everything we do, to not let an opportunity pass when we too can bring the promise of God's love and the hope that comes with it to the lives of those we touch. It comes in our desire to be willing to lay down our lives, as so many of the first disciples did, to bring the word of God to all those with open ears and empty hearts.

It begins with our willingness to set aside our own will and desires and to come before God with a penitent heart, and to place all of our trust in Him for our lives and a desire to do His will as an expression of our love for Him. This is the passion that needs to fill our lives everyday, as a means of thanksgiving for all that He has given us in our lives.

Devotion in the face of adversity is often a hard path to follow. That is why the Holy Spirit is with us, to help us, to give us strength and meet each day with new commitment. He is there to lift us up when we fall and see us through when the road seems endless. Our eyes should ever be focused on God in appreciation for His sacrifice for us on the cross. The debt He paid for our souls which He did not owe, a debt we could never pay.

From St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Today, as we go forward into the world, go with joy in your hearts because of the wonderful gift that God has given us through Christ Jesus. Let there be a little spring in your step, shine with the light of Christ and peace be in your hearts, for we are God's children and have hope in Jesus Christ through our faith.

As St. Paul ended his letter to the Church at Thessalonica, "MAY GOD HIMSELF, THE GOD OF PEACE, SANCTIFY YOU THROUGH AND THROUGH. MAY YOUR WHOLE SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY BE KEPT BLAMELESS AT THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL AND HE WILL DO IT" AMEN