

Sermon for Morning Prayer
St. Luke the Evangelist

Lessons:

First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.¹

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed [SHOWED] himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you

to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And ... commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father.... [Y]e shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence [and] ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”² In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today’s First Lesson has always given me a mental picture of some ancient messenger running to bring his sovereign the good news of the signing of a peace treaty or, like Pheidippides [*Fee-uh-DIP-uh-Deze*] running to Athens from the Battle of Marathon, of a great national victory that ends a war. This image was chosen to be today’s Epistle, of course, because today is the Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist, one of the four inspired authors who wrote down the ultimate Good News.

In older English, “God spel” meant “good news”, which is how we get our word “Gospel”. We remember St. Luke for the Gospel of St. Luke which is one of the most important books of the New Testament. We often forget that it is also one of the longest because it has come down to us in two separate parts: what we might call “Volume One” is

what we know as “The Gospel According to St. Luke” and “Volume Two” is what we know as “The Acts of the Apostles”.

Theme:

The Apostles were told to remain in Jerusalem for a few days, after which they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit and would receive power from on high. Although they themselves did not at that time know what was meant by those odd turns of phrase, they shortly came to understand that “Baptism by the Holy Spirit” means the receipt, normally by a person who has already been baptized with water, of the Holy Spirit in a more comprehensive way than the Grace he had undoubtedly received merely by his baptism by water.

They also shortly came to understand that they themselves, in their Office as Apostles, had the authority to perform this baptism of the Holy Spirit through what we have come to call the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Development:

1. We are incorporated into the Body of Christ when we have received the Sacrament of Baptism.

When Nicodemus came to Christ and confessed that Christ’s miracles had convinced him Christ came from God—Christ told him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”³ When Nicodemus asked how this could take place, Christ told him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”⁴

We have been left no written account of the Baptism of any one of the original Apostles. Nevertheless, we may

be sure that each of them was, in fact, baptized. First, there is the example of Our Lord himself, who was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan.⁵ It would defy belief if these disciples did not submit themselves to what the Master himself so scrupulously and conspicuously underwent.

This conforms directly to Our Lord's own express directives: He sent the Apostles out into the world to baptize and teach,⁶ so they could not possibly have failed to understand that Baptism is necessary for full membership in the Church. And it is written that they actually followed Our Lord's injunction, as when St. Philip baptized his Samaritan converts⁷ and when St. Peter commanded the household of Cornelius the Centurion at Joppa to be baptized.⁸

2. The fullness of Baptism is twofold: first baptism by water and then by the Holy Spirit.

Note that when Nicodemus came to Christ to ask how we may be reborn, Christ told him we must be reborn "of water and of the Spirit".⁹ What this means is explained in The Acts of the Apostles.

There we are told how, after the persecution that arose upon the murder of Saint Stephen, Saint Philip, one of the original seven Deacons,¹⁰ left Jerusalem and went north to Samaria.¹¹ There he preached and when he converted some of the Samaritans, he baptized them.¹² Then Saints Peter and John came to inspect his work and, finding that the new converts had not yet received the Holy Spirit, laid their hands upon them.¹³ Thus did the Church, under the guidance of the Spirit,¹⁴ discover the Sacrament of Confirmation.¹⁵ For our present purpose, what is significant here is that by the Apostles' action, these converts each received the Holy Spirit in a new way, something beyond what they had received in their baptism by Philip.¹⁶

⁷ Acts 8:12.

⁸ Acts 10:47-48.

⁹ St. John 3:5 (KJV).

¹⁰ Acts 6:5.

¹¹ Acts 8:5.

¹² Acts 8:12.

¹³ Acts 8:14-16.

¹⁴ *See especially* St. John 16:7-15; *see also* St. Mark 13:11b and St. Luke 12:11-12, St. John 14:16, 14:26, and 15:26.

¹⁵ *Cf. The Order of Confirmation*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 296 (PECUSA 1928), where this account is read as a Lesson.

¹⁶ Acts 8:17.

¹⁷ *The Order of Confirmation*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 297 (PECUSA 1928).

¹⁸ Acts 10:44-46.

¹⁹ Acts 46b-48.

²⁰ Acts 2:6.

²¹ St. John 20:21-23 (KJV).

²² St. John 7:39 (KJV).

²³ *E.g.*, "That it may please thee to bless these thy servants, now to be admitted to the Order of Deacons, and to pour thy grace upon them; that they may duly execute their Office, to the edifying of thy Church and the glory of thy holy Name", *The Form and Manner of Making Deacons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 531 (PECUSA 1928).

²⁴ Acts 2:1-4.

²⁵ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 581 (PECUSA 1928).

²⁶ Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA.

However, if we are people into whom God has instilled His own Presence, and for whom, particularly in the Sacraments of the Eucharist, He regularly re-instills Himself into us, that poses for us a very particular problem.

That problem is this: if we are people who carry around the actual Presence of God within ourselves, and, moreover, do so only by a special dispensation of God Himself, then that special status constitutes a special vocation or calling. But if we are people who live indelibly marked with a special vocation or calling from God, then we must regularly ask ourselves, are we living up to that high calling?

Do we bear ourselves as befits people who have thus been called by God?

Do we exemplify, in all our words and actions, what people so called should show themselves to be?

Do we do everything in our power to fulfill the purposes and goals God has set forth for our calling? In particular, and in the words of today's First Lesson, are we messengers bringing the good tidings of Christ to those who have not yet heard them? And in the words of today's Second Lesson, are we using to God's profit the power which the Holy Ghost has given us?

--oo0oo--

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister²⁶
October 18, 2008.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER (PECUSA 1928), commonly called "the 1943 Lectionary".

² Acts 1:4a, 5b & 8 (KJV).

³ St. John 3:3 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 3:5 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 3:16.

⁶ St. Matthew 28:19-20.

The Samaritans' experience became the norm within the Church: first someone is baptized with water and then that Baptism is completed by Confirmation, *i.e.*, a Bishop, as the successor to the Apostles, lays his hands upon him with the prayer that he will receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Something very similar to this happened during Saint Peter's visit to Cornelius and his family although on that occasion the order of events was reversed, as an extraordinary lesson from God to Peter, reversed: first the converts received the Holy Spirit directly, as the Apostles had on Pentecost,¹⁸ in order to show Peter that God had taken them into the Church despite their not being Jews. Only then did Peter have them baptized.¹⁹

For the first couple of centuries of the Church's existence, Baptism and Confirmation were normally administered together, as part of one extended service. This is how the Eastern Orthodox still do it, with the Priest "chrismating" the person being baptized, that is, anointing him or her with oil that has been blessed for this purpose by the Bishop. This practice, the Church's original one and the Eastern Orthodox's current one, clearly shows that Baptism and Confirmation are fundamentally two portions of one overall process and that Confirmation is the completion or fulfillment of Baptism.

So when we have been baptized with water and confirmed by a Bishop in the Apostolic Succession, we have been reborn "of water and of the Spirit". There is no Scriptural warrant for the belief that has grown up among so-called Pentecostals and "Charismatics", beginning a few decades into the 20th Century, that that no one has been "baptized in the Holy Spirit" until he or she has given certain manifestations of extreme emotional excitement.

Acts does not record that the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost either danced, shook, waived their hands in the air, or rolled on the ground. Further, it clearly indicates that

when they did what was described as “speaking in tongues” the word translated as “tongues” meant genuine human languages, for each of which there was someone present to hear their testimonies in his or her own native dialect.²⁰

Similarly, while we are not told just how Saint Peter knew the Holy Spirit had descended on Cornelius the Centurion and his household, or how Saints Peter and John knew that the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit after they laid their hands on them, nowhere is it recorded that these people in any way acted as though they were attending a modern so-called “Full Gospel” revival.

3. **The Apostles’ commissions as successors to Jesus Christ were “activated” on the day of Pentecost.**

Saint John records Christ’s commissioning of the Apostles as His successors in these words:

“... [A]s my father hath sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”²¹

The form of these words does not necessarily mean that at the moment of speaking Christ was conferring on the Apostles “the Power of the Keys”, that is, the power to forgive sins. Rather, the words “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” could just as easily mean, “When the time has come, you will receive the Holy Ghost”.

This is consistent with what Saint John says in fact happened with others of Christ’s utterances prior to His Passion: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.”²² Here, “should receive” clearly indicates that a prediction was being made

or a direction was being given that was to be fulfilled later. Further, the assertion that the reason for this delay was “because Jesus was not yet glorified” clearly states that this fulfillment would come after Christ’s Ascension, *i.e.*, on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles to “inspire” or “enliven” the new Church.²³

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that the promises Christ made to the Apostles prior to His Ascension were predictions of what would happen after that Ascension and, further, that those promises took effect on Pentecost at the moment when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles.²⁴

This event is reenacted in our own time each time a new minister is ordained in the Church and, in the course of the ordination service, receives the Holy Spirit for the Office that is being conferred and for the work that is to about to be undertaken.

Conclusion:

If we appreciate the true nature of Baptism and Confirmation, and, indeed, of all the other Sacraments, we must accept that Christ intended them in a very real way to infuse God’s Presence into us. As the Catechism tells us, a Sacrament is the “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us ... as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof”.²⁵ Those words “given unto us” reflect the Latin word *gratia* [**Grah-TEE-ah**], or “gift”, meaning that God has *given* us His Presence.

As we seen in Acts, He gives His Presence to the Church’s officeholders in the Sacrament of Holy Order. But as we also see in Acts, He gives it to each member of the Church in his or her own Baptism as completed by Confirmation.