

PENTECOST

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HAIL THEE FESTIVAL DAY BLESSED DAY THAT ART HALLOWED FOREVER

*Hail thee festival day! Blest day that art hallowed for ever,
day when the Holy Ghost shone in the world with God's grace.*1*

1. Lo in the likeness of fire, on those who await his appearing,
he whom the Lord foretold suddenly swiftly descends:
2. Forth from the Father he comes with sevenfold mystical offering,
pouring on all human souls infinite riches of God:
3. Hark! for in myriad tongues Christ's own, his chosen apostles,
preach to the ends of the earth Christ and his wonderful works:
4. Praise to the Spirit of Life, all praise to the fount of our being,
light that dost lighten- all, life that in all dost abide.

COLLECT: The Day of Pentecost: Whitsunday²

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race
and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift
throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to
the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns
with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*

¹ * Refrain follows each verse Hymn #225 *Salve festa dies, Pentecost*
Williams, Ralph Vaughan (1872-1958)

² Prayer Book and Hymnal; Church Hymnal Corp., New York, NY, 1986, page 227

WAITING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Today is Pentecost. “Praise to the Spirit of Life,” said Ralph Vaughn Williams in *Hail thee Festival Day* his great Pentecost hymn. The Spirit who brooded on the face of the waters at creation: the Spirit of the Lord who enlightened the prophets is the Spirit, who rested on Jesus the Son of God throughout His life on earth. This same Spirit descended in tongues of fire on the disciples at Pentecost.. The disciples had to wait for Jesus to come to them between the time of the Crucifixion and His Resurrection and now they had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to them at Pentecost.

Most of us find “waiting” difficult. Frequently “waiting” is the most difficult thing to do: students waiting to hear whether school will reopen and when. Waiting to get grades on academic work: did I pass. Today, some people are waiting to have an elective surgery. We are all waiting for the terrible pandemic to end. When can we go out safely. When can we go back to Church? When can we gather as friends in groups. When can we go back to work? When will it be safe. We are waiting. How long will we wear masks and keep six feet distance from each other?

All of us are waiting for peace and justice. The African-American community in Minneapolis is especially waiting for justice. George Ford, a black man was brutally murdered by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, as other white police looked on. The country was watching the killing on television! The policeman held his leg on the neck of the victim, who was down on the ground. George shouted, “I can not breathe! He died of suffocation. Racial tensions flared as people crashed stores and set fires.

The rioting was awful. One man who took thirteen years to build up his store that was destroyed was in tears. It took several days for the white attorney general to arrest the police officer and charge him with a lesser third degree murder.

Having to wait for something can be trying and worrisome. We may not know what is going to happen, but waiting can be worthwhile. The disciples had to wait to become Apostles, those who have known the Risen Lord. However, only through Jesus Christ do we know the Spirit as Person. The Church welcomes Her³ with joy as the living bond of Her union with the Father and the Son, and the unfailing source of Her renewal.”⁴

The Holy Spirit is the active action of God in everything good that happens in life. We can feel the Spirit moving in one of the great passages of the Bible, when the prophet Isaiah (40;31), alive with the Holy Spirit proclaims:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings as eagles.”

When we are revitalized by the Lord’s strength, it is like soaring!

Waiting is difficult. In our Pentecost scene from the Book of Acts, we find the Apostles, the family of Jesus, and other followers of Christ - waiting! They are waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit which the Lord had promised would come to them. And when She comes, when the waiting is over, when they are filled with the Spirit, when they are reborn, their waiting is graced with a power that will change the world forever.

³ The Greek gender is feminine, so it is proper that the English translation be “Her.”for the *Holy Spirit*. RWB

⁴ Appleton, George; The Oxford Book of Prayer, 1985**

In the highly entertaining and successful television mini-series several years ago, entitled *Shogun*, we heard the Japanese lady Mariko tell the European called Blackthorne (played by Richard Chamberlain) that:

“You must know how to drink tea out of an empty cup.”

How, like the world that statement is: For the world is forever emptying our cup of life, and then telling us that we must pretend that it is still full- To suffer and keep smiling. To be darned and pretend that we are still full. To be burned out and still go through the motions of living - Well that's not good enough for us: We need to be filled. We want to be filled with the Spirit of life: And we are willing to wait for Her coming. For we have had glimpses, here and there, of richness which the Spirit of life can give. We know that it is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Creation, Who holds the real riches of life and we are willing to wait for Her touch to grant us the grace of God which brings joy and gladness to our souls.

Waiting for the Spirit of God to come also involves- *listening*, listening for God. The Danish religious philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), saw waiting and listening in terms of prayer. He expressed the thought, “The ‘immediate’ person thinks and imagines that when one prays the important thing one must concentrate upon, is that God should hear what the person is praying for. Yet in the true, eternal sense it is just the reverse. The true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when the people praying continue to pray until they are the ones who hear what God wills. The immediate person, therefore makes demands in their prayers: the true person of prayer only attends.”⁵

⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren; printed in *Killenger Sermons*: June 7, 1987, Toronto, ON. page 2

Listening prayer is vital to the things of the Spirit. It is essential if we would hear and find what we need for our souls:

“Travelers tell us that there are rivers flowing beneath the streets of the ancient city of, Shechem in Israeli occupied Jordan. During the hours of the day you cannot hear them for the noise of the narrow streets and bazaars. But evening comes: the clamor dies away, and the dews kindly sleep rest on the city; and then quite audibly, in the hush of night, you may hear the *music* made by the buried streams.⁶

There are riches for our minds and souls. But we must learn to wait, and we must learn to listen!

Some of us are touched and graced by the Spirit early in life. Some of us do not sense it until most of life has passed by. Most of us experience the Spirit as a coming and going blessing.

The famous prayer-writer, Marjorie Holmes, spoke to this latter majority of people when she prayed:

“I prayed for the Holy Spirit to come into me, Lord I prayed for the fullness of its fire, destroying the old proud, rebellious, selfish, foolish me. And the sweet fire came and I was purged. For a time I was freed. Then the old me roused up scowling and full of darkness and began to misbehave. Yet memory of the fire of the Holy Spirit remained to comfort me.”⁷

Whether the the loving Spirit of God comes early or late. Whether we know Her now and then, She is worth waiting for. She is our promise of joy.

⁶ Morrison, George; *Master Sermons Through the Ages, sermon*, Harper & Row, 1963

⁷ Holmes, Marjorie, *Who Am I, God?: Bantam, 1973, copied in Kiplinger Sermons: Whitsunday; June 7, 1987, Toronto, Ontario, page 2*

There was a prominent lawyer named Karl, a wonderful man, a good churchman. He had been baptized and confirmed. He regularly came to church and read Sunday lessons with beautiful articulation. He was on the evaluation committee for Seminarians doing field work at the church.

Karl and his minister were very good friends. They went rafting together on the local river. They shared Karl's cabin in the woods. Their families had many meals together, and they always said grace.

But Karl had trouble making that necessary leap of faith to have security in Christianity. Karl said, he wanted to believe, he prayed that God would help him believe, but there was doubt that kept nagging him. Karl was an outstanding basketball player in college. In their elder years, Karl and his minister friend shot hoops at Karl's outdoor basket and backboard. One day when Karl was bemoaning his lack of faith, the minister thought of Karl's interest in sports. The Holy Spirit moved him to say to Karl: "Have faith, its the only game in town!" Karl paused, and looking his clergy friend in the eye- he replied, "Its the only game in town. Its the only game in town!" That did it! Karl could make the leap of faith! Shortly thereafter, Karl and his wife both died and entered larger life in God's Heavenly Kingdom.

My friends, "Have faith, Its the only game in town." Amen