

The Sunday after the Ascension - Exaudi / Sixth Sunday after Easter

Hymns: 189, 215, 223, 217

The INTROIT

(Ps.27:1,8-9)

P: Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice:

C: Hallelujah!

P: When Thou saidst, seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee,

C: Thy face, Lord, will I seek; Hide not Thy face from me. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: The Lord is my Light and my Salvation;

C: whom shall I fear?

The COLLECT

Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

THE GRADUAL

(Ps. 47:5; 68:18a)

P: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: God reigneth over the heathen:

C: God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness. Hallelujah!

P: Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered:

C: let them also that hate Him flee before Him.

The EPISTLE

1 Peter 4:7-11

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

P: *Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover:*
C: **is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah!**

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 15:26-16:4

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Ezekiel 36

- 25 And I will sprinkle upon you water pure and pure you will be. From all your impurities and from all your logs/idols I will purify you.
- 26 And I will give to you a heart new/fresh and a spirit new/fresh I will give in your bowels and I will cause to turn that heart, the stone, from your flesh and will give to you a heart of flesh.
- 27 And even My Spirit I will give in your bowels, and I did that which in My statutes/enactments you will walk, and My judgements you will guard and do.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 — “And I Did That Which in My Statutes You Will Walk”

INTRODUCTION

- I. FROM ALL YOUR IMPURITIES AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS
- II. AND I WILL CAUSE TO TURN THAT HEART, THAT STONE, FROM YOUR FLESH
- III. AND I DID THAT WHICH IN MY STATUTES YOU WILL WALK

CONCLUSION

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Ezekiel 36:25-27 — “And I Did That Which in My Statutes You Will Walk”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The appointed reading of the Old Testament for the Sunday after the Ascension is Ezekiel 36:25-27:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The ascension of our Lord is truly cause for joy in our hearts. Because He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, in Christ Jesus mankind is restored and made whole and pure again. Because Jesus sits in the place of the King of Glory, ruling as a man, our brother, the firstfruit of the Resurrection, with all the power of the Godhead, He has sent His Holy Spirit through whom God rules over our hearts. The ascension of our Lord makes possible the sending of the Holy Spirit to be sprinkled upon us in the pure water whereby God's Word comes to us to live in us, that is, Jesus comes to live in us. Where Jesus is, so also is the Spirit and the Father, and so the Holy Communion of God is restored and mankind again lives in the image of God in which God created Man. But this is not the old man who fell into sin by choosing for himself a heart built upon his own reason and emotions or felt needs. No! This is an entirely new man, with a renewed heart, regenerated by the gift of God's own Spirit given with the sprinkling of holy water that God Himself sprinkles upon us so that we have regenerated hearts made alive and fresh by the creation of a new and right spirit within us so that God has worked His statutes for us so that we will live by means of what He has done through them.

I. FROM ALL YOUR IMPURITIES AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS

And I will sprinkle upon you water pure and pure you will be. From all your impurities and from all your logs/idols I will purify you.

Are these not glorious words?! Such freedom is only known by those in whom God has worked His sanctification! Here the LORD tells us that what He worked for us from the very beginning of the world He has worked for us again through the promise of the Seed of the woman. Here God tells us of His work that extends to us from eternity, from the very throne of glory and almighty power, His work that He has worked for us and pours out to us from heaven through the Word empowered water that He sprinkles upon us.

Such water does not exist in what we count as the natural world. There is no water in the cosmos that has in it the power to purify completely. Water is truly a cleansing agent, but by itself, it cannot remove the imbedded stains that permanently corrupt the articles washed by water. Yet here God promises a pure water that has the power to purify completely with a single sprinkling. And this is not a superficial purification, but a purification that reaches to the very bowels of a person, and even beyond the bowels to the heart and spirit and mind.

Truly this is marvelous! With the water that the LORD God sprinkles us on the exterior of our bodies He takes the totality of our impurities and even the logs from our eyes, the idols that we set up for ourselves to look toward in our misguided anxieties, and purifies us of them.

The word that is translated as idols is the same word as for logs. This is that of which the Lord Jesus warns in Matthew 7:1-5:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

The mote or the little twig that our brother has set up before his eye is what we jump to judge, without even seeing the beam or the tree trunk that we have set up before our own eyes. From this kind of judging of others we set up church bodies that we carve out for ourselves, where we feel justified in our own works. This warning of our Lord Jesus is repeated in Luke 6:40-46:

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

The good tree is the tree that the LORD has created and planted and caused to grow. The good tree produces the fruit that God brings forth. A life of true worship, a life in God's true and holy communion is what is produced. Traditions and family heritage are counted as nothing. Only the words and works of the LORD are guarded as sacred treasures. All else is cast out.

Isaiah records in 44:13-23:

The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

How many logs have we carved out for ourselves in our lives? To what things does your heart turn instead of turning to God in all things? House and home? Food and drink? Steady income? Family? Husband or wife? Children or parents? Government protection or assistance? Friends? Neighbors? Church body? Independence? Self-reliance? Medications? Doctors? Is there an end to the things to which we turn in our impurity and lack of faith?

Regarding all of these things and whatever others that corrupt our hearts, minds, and souls, the LORD declares:

And I will sprinkle upon you water pure and pure you will be. From all your impurities and from all your logs/idols I will purify you.

The Lord Jesus declares that we should cast out the log from our own eyes. But who has the power to do this? The LORD has the power. This is the very reason that He instituted Baptism as the means for purifying us from our impurities. He knows that we are powerless to escape our dependency upon our idols. He knows that we are powerless to generate faith to trust Him and to serve Him. Therefore He teaches us not even to try to do this for ourselves, but to turn to the means by which He promises to do it completely for us. **“From all your impurities and from all your logs/idols I will purify you.”** How does the LORD promise to do this? **“And I will sprinkle upon you water pure and pure you will be.”**

II. AND I WILL CAUSE TO TURN THAT HEART, THAT STONE, FROM YOUR FLESH

And I will give to you a heart new/fresh and a spirit new/fresh I will give in your bowels and I will cause to turn that heart, the stone, from your flesh and will give to you a heart of flesh.

This is what we pray and confess as we sing the offertory each time that we congregate. This is how sanctification really works. God purifies us. How? Not by what we think, say, or do, but by giving to us a heart that is fresh and new by giving us spirit that is fresh and new. He works a true and complete change in the very innermost part of our being. In our very bowels where we have the beginnings of our feelings and emotional reactions, He causes a turning of our heart. He turns our stone cold heart, our heart that resists His grace at every thought, our heart that says “No!” to the working of God in our lives and insists on deciding to follow God according to our own choices based upon our own reason and strength, this stone God causes to turn into a heart of flesh, that is, a real heart that beats with the blood of Christ flowing through it, so that His blood moves through our flesh to every cell and revitalizes us, making us alive through the regeneration with which He sprinkles us and the renewal that He feeds us.

Notice the joyous freedom that the LORD declares to us. He does not say that we should seek to find God and to ask Him to come into our hearts. He does not say that we should turn ourselves around and make ourselves alive by choosing to believe in Him. He does not say that we should clean up our lives and our hearts and our minds and our spirits and our emotions. No! He says:

And I will give to you a heart new/fresh and a spirit new/fresh I will give in your bowels and I will cause to turn that heart, the stone, from your flesh and will give to you a heart of flesh.

This is what we resist the most strongly. We simply are unable to believe that God is this good. We simply will not trust God to be God. Rather, we insist on being our own saviors. We insist that we must justify ourselves and sanctify ourselves a little at a time. We insist that we must convince ourselves of the truth. We insist that we must make faith our own work. We insist that we must work to improve our lives so that our hearts change little by little so that we become more holy and more pure and nearer to God. We insist that we must strive after holiness and choose for ourselves the way of righteousness.

But God knows that this is beyond anything that we can do for ourselves. He knows the sinful nature that we have inherited from Adam. He knows that this goes much deeper than we can wash away by any attempts that we may choose to make. He knows that this is not merely something that He must begin in us so that we can work it through to completion. He knows that this is not something that we do for ourselves with His help when we need an extra boost.

No! This is His work, which He alone has the power to accomplish. And He does it through such simple means that even the newborn infant can receive it. Even the little baby who has just recently taken his first breath can be cleansed and purified everlastingly with one sprinkling of the water that God enjoins to His command and promise. In this single event God gives a new and fresh heart of flesh that is not dead in sin but is made alive through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. As the Word conjoined to the water touches the person in the flesh, the Holy Spirit works mightily to regenerate the heart of stone into a renewed heart that lives and breathes with a renewed spirit of true faith. This heart and spirit are a new person, an entirely justified and sanctified son of God and heir of God’s kingdom. Because of

the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in connection with the resurrection a new man is brought forth to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

III. AND I DID THAT WHICH IN MY STATUTES YOU WILL WALK

And even My Spirit I will give in your bowels, and I did that which in My statutes/enactments you will walk, and My judgements you will guard and do.

Yes! The new and pure spirit that comes to life within our heart, turning our heart of stone to a fresh and living heart of flesh, this miracle of life from death is accomplished by the gift of God's Holy Spirit through the means of the sprinkling of the water that God sprinkles upon us. We need not ask how this can be, because God has declared it and promised it. We know that God cannot lie. Thus we believe it for what God declares it to be, a saving water and a washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3 & 1 Peter 3:21)

No doctor can cut deeply enough to find the Holy Spirit that God has given in our bowels. That is why modern psychiatry and psychology merely attempt to modify and manipulate the symptoms that people display concerning their sick unto death existence in this world. No medication can alter this. The problem is not chemical or physical, for life is not of bodily function alone. It is the spirit of a person that animates the person. A dead spirit cannot be made alive again by defibrillation or by artificial respiration or by chemicals and drugs or by surgery or by hypnosis or by coercion. A dead spirit makes a person dead and the corruption of death fills the person until the body finally succumbs to the corruption that fills it through and through. The decay of death of the spirit stinks up the entire being of the person. Everything that the dead person does according to the death of his sin corrupted soul is corrupt. The person is without hope.

But Christ, the great Physician cuts to the very heart and takes the dead spirit and regenerates it. This is the power of the Gospel. This is what the Holy Spirit works in connection with Christ, the living Word. His resurrection guarantees it. His ascension puts it into action. God has worked it. He declared His statutes to Adam and Eve and to every generation until the Day of Pentecost and the fulfillment of the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all flesh. Through these statutes God kept His chosen ones safe in what He has worked even from eternity and fulfilled in time with the birth, ministry, suffering and death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Now He places His judgments of righteousness and holiness upon us through Baptism so that what He has worked for us we keep and guard in our hearts and do them. This is not a choice that we must make. Quite contrarily, this is the work of God in us by the gift of the Holy Spirit. He has declared his statutes or enactments. Baptism was sealed unto a once for all resurrection for us when Jesus was baptized so that the water of Baptism was conjoined to Him in His flesh forevermore. Now we truly receive the Word made flesh when we are Baptized. Therefore the statutes that guarded the saints of the Old Testament have been fulfilled and are washed away with sin, death, and the power of the devil. Now Baptism is our safeguard unto everlasting life. Now Baptism lifts us up in the ark of the one true Church and carries us through our daily life so that God's enactments are worked in us so that His judgments of reception into His righteousness and blessedness in His Holy Communion are what we guard and do. That is why Jesus commanded that we do this often into the remembrance of Him. This is how He refreshes us in His body through the continual outpouring of His blood of the New Testament. As He turns our hearts to do this He applies to us the judgement of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins fills and refreshes us with the Life that is in the blood.

CONCLUSION

Is the LORD not a gracious and merciful God? Who but the LORD ever acts in this way? Who? His saints do, as God works in them to guard them in His grace, mercy, and peace. Yes, we do the judgements of the Lord as we gather to hear the preaching of the pure Word and as we receive His justification and sanctification in Baptism and as we eat His body of unity and drink His blood of forgiveness and new life. As we do these things truly it is a Eucharist, a meal of everlasting Thanksgiving. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes! In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.