Pentecost A 2020

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. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus satisfies thirst

When Jesus invited the thirsty to come to him to drink, he was not referring to water or alcohol. If that were the case, then he would not have asked the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink. Nor would He have cried out on the cross: I thirst.

When His body thirsted, He needed water as ours do. But He was referring to a different thirst, a thirst of the soul. What does that mean exactly? As water quenches thirst after working or running on a hot humid day, what can satisfy the soul when it is thirsty? What does it mean for the soul to be thirsty? Will water suffice? How can souls drink anything?

When souls become thirsty, they need something, they are lacking something. Parched souls, like dehydrated bodies desperately need to be revived. If nothing happens, ever, death results.

So if water refreshes thirst, what refreshes the soul? If the answer lies in personal happiness, then deception has diverted the soul away from the Creator to His creation. Tempting is the allure of seeking things to fill the soul’s emptiness rather than to be with the One who made both body and soul and all things.

Idolatry is the result of quenching souls with anything other than the living God. Of this we all have tried in vain. We have all drunk from the well of pleasure in excess, beyond gratitude to the One who provided it. We have all tried to improve ourselves and to fill the emptiness in vain.

There is a universal thirst of the soul that things and people cannot satisfy. It is the guilt of fallen pleasure seekers who have come to know that their past binges cannot be forgotten. Parched are the souls when the lost opportunities to be kind to the needy are brought before God. Gone are the good records of those who know they have not feared, loved and trusted God before anything or anyone else.

And even though we still desperately try to refresh our souls with pleasure and people, Jesus comes to you now with a promise. If you come to me, I will give you drink. I will not turn you away. I will satisfy your soul’s thirst for true love, for meaning, purpose and for life itself. I will never turn you away. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for I will satisfy you. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

The promise He makes to us today is the same as He made to the Jewish worshippers who had come to Jerusalem for the great feast of weeks or booths in John 7. Seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread added up to fifty days. The feast day was known in Greek as Pentecost, meaning 50.

Today we celebrate Pentecost as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church, without limits. The Spirit is given to both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. Wherever and whenever the soul is quenched with Jesus, the Spirit is at work through the words of the gospel.

The Feast of Pentecost was also known as booths or tabernacles which were tents that were pitched outside Jerusalem for the worshippers to camp in as a reminder of their 40 years of camping in the wilderness. The festal worshippers would carry lulabs, branches in their right hands marking the stages of the wilderness journey and in his left hand, a citron, representing the fruit of the good land into which the Lord God would bring them.

Now to quote Leon Morris (The New International Commentary on the New Testament):

“The rejoicing was marked further by the flute-playing and dancing that went on for most of the feast and by bringing in young willow branches and arranging them round the altar. The tops thus were bent over the altar forming a leafy canopy for it. The reciting of the words, “Save now, we beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, we beseech thee, send now prosperity” (Psalm 118:25), is probably to be understood as a prayer for rain and fruitful season. On each of the seven days of the feast a priest drew water from the pool of Siloam in a golden flagon and brought it in procession to the temple with the joyful sounding of the trumpet. There the water was poured into a bowl beside the altar from which a tube took it to the base of the altar. Simultaneously wine was poured through a similar bowl on the other side of the altar. These symbolic ceremonies were acted thanksgivings for God’s mercies in giving water in past days.”

With this background Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” The Israelites heard of the rock in the wilderness from Exodus 17. It was called Massah, meaning testing and Meribah, quarelling. They were angry with God for they were dying without water. Moses was commanded to strike the rock and water gushed forth.

Now Jesus promised that He would give water to anyone who comes to him to drink. How amazing to connect the water and wine poured out at the Jerusalem altar with the water and blood that poured out of the Saviour’s spent body on the cross! Jesus gave up his life for the life of the world. From his side flows the baptismal water and Eucharistic blood from which the church lives.

What a Lord who not only created water but also sends us the Holy Spirit to satisfy our souls. Out of the heart of those who drink of Jesus, living water will flow. This He meant was the Holy Spirit who would be poured out on Pentecost as we know it.

The Holy Spirit not only brings us Jesus so that our ultimate thirst is gone but brings out of our dry and parched souls, living water without limit and in such abundance that the Spirit-filled life will be a blessing to others.

Now that Christ has gone to the cross and been glorified, risen and ascended to His Father, the Spirit is given without limits. Jesus was thirsty on his cross so that our thirst is gone forever!

Collect of the Day: O God, on this day, You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.