

XXIV.

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“The Holy Spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” —[John vii. 39](#).

We have come to the most difficult part in the discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit, viz., the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the tenth day after the ascension.

In the treatment of this subject it is not our aim to create a new interest in the celebration of Pentecost. We consider this almost impossible. Man’s nature is too unspiritual for this. But we shall reverently endeavor to give a clearer insight into this event to those in whose hearts the Holy Spirit has already begun His work.

For, however simple the account of the second chapter of the Acts may seem, it is very intricate and hard to explain; and he who earnestly tries to understand and explain the event will meet more and more serious difficulties as he penetrates more deeply into the inward connection of the Holy Scripture. For this reason we claim not that our exposition will entirely solve this mystery. We shall endeavor only to fix the sanctified mind of the people of God more earnestly upon it, and convince them that on the whole this subject is treated too superficially.

Four difficulties meet us in the examination of this event:

First, How shall we explain the fact that while the Holy Spirit was poured out only on Pentecost, the saints of the Old Covenant were already partakers of His gifts?

Second, How shall we distinguish the outpouring of the Holy Spirit nineteen centuries ago from His entering into the soul of the unconverted to-day?

Third, How could the apostles—having already confessed the good confession, forsaking all, following Jesus, and upon whom He had breathed, saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” —receive the Holy Spirit only on the tenth day after the ascension?

Fourth, How are we to explain the mysterious signs that accompany the outpouring? There are no angels praising God, but a sound is heard like that of a rushing, mighty wind; the glory of the Lord does not appear, but tongues of fire hover over their heads; there is no theophany, but a speaking in peculiar and uncommon sounds, understood, however, by those present.

With reference to the *first difficulty*: How to explain the fact that, while the Holy Spirit was poured out only on Pentecost, the saints of the Old Covenant were already partakers of His gifts. Let us put this in the concrete: How are the following passages to be reconciled? “I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts, and My Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not” ([Hag. ii. 4, 5](#)); and “This spake He of the Holy Spirit which they that believe should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified” ([John vii. 39](#)).



Scripture evidently seeks to impress us with the two facts, that the Holy Spirit came only on the day of Pentecost, and that the same Spirit had wrought already for centuries in the Church of the Old Covenant. Not only does St. John declare definitely that the Holy Spirit was not yet given, but the predictions of the prophets and of Jesus and the whole attitude of the apostles show that this fact may not in the least be weakened.

Let us first examine the prophecies. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel bear undeniable witness to the fact that this was the expectation of the prophets.

Isaiah says: “The palaces shall be forsaken, the multitudes of the city shall be left—*until the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high; then* the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be counted for a forest; *then* judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.” This prophecy evidently refers to an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that shall effect a work of salvation on a large scale, for it closes with the promise: “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever” ([Isa. xxxii. 14-17](#)).

In like manner did Ezekiel prophesy “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; 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; and I will save you from all your uncleanness. Not for yourselves will I do this, saith the Lord, be it known unto you” ([chap. xxxvi. 25](#)). [Ezek. xi. 19](#) gives the prelude of this prophecy: “Thus saith the Lord God, I will give them one heart, and I will give a new Spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, that they may walk in My statutes.”

Joel uttered his well-known prophecy: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon thy servants and upon thy handmaidens in those days will I pour out My Spirit” ([Joel ii. 30, 31](#));—a prophecy which, according to the authoritative exposition of St. Peter, refers directly to the day of Pentecost.

Zechariah adds a beautiful prophecy ([xii. 10](#)): “I will pour out the Spirit of grace and of supplication.”

It is true that these prophecies were given to Israel during its later period, when the vigorous spiritual life of the nation had already departed. But Moses expressed the same thought in his prophetic prayer: “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them” ([Num. xi. 29](#)). But these prophecies are evidence of the Old Testament prophetic conviction that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit in those days was exceedingly imperfect; that the real dispensation of the Holy Spirit was still tarrying; and that only in the days of the Messiah was it to come in all its fulness and glory.



Regarding the *second difficulty*, our Lord repeatedly put the stamp of His divine authority upon this prophetic conviction, announcing to His disciples the still future coming of the Holy Spirit: “I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world can not receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him, for He dwelleth with you *and shall be in you*” (John xiv. 16, 17); “When the Comforter is come whom I will send from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me” (John xv. 26); “Behold, I send the promise of the Father upon you, and ye shall be endued with power from on high” (Luke xxiv. 49); “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come; He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment” (John xvi. 7, 8). And lastly: He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to 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. And ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts i. 4, 5, 8).

The *third difficulty* is met by the fact that the communications of the apostles agree with the teaching of Scripture. They actually tarried in Jerusalem, without even attempting to preach during the days between the ascension and Pentecost. And they explain the Pentecost miracle as the fulfilment of the prophecies of Joel and Jesus. They see in it something new and extraordinary; and show us clearly that in their day it was considered that a man who stood outside the Pentecost miracle knew nothing of the Holy Ghost. For the disciples of Ephesus being asked, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost?” answered naively: “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.”

Wherefore it cannot be doubted that the Holy Scripture means to teach and convince us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was His first and real coming into the Church.

But how can this be reconciled with Old Testament passages such as these? “Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, the High Priest; . . . for I am with you, . . . and My Spirit *remaineth among you: fear ye not*” (Hag. ii. 4, 5); and again: “Then He remembered the days of old, Moses, and His people, saying, Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the Shepherd of His flock? where is He that put His Holy Spirit within them?” (Isa. lxiii. 11). David is conscious that he had received the Holy Spirit, for after his fall he prays: “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm li. 13). There was a sending forth of the Spirit, for we read: “Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, and they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth” (Psalm civ. 30). There seems to have been an actual descending of the Holy Spirit, for Ezekiel says: “The Spirit of the Lord fell upon me” (chap. xi. 5). Micah testified: “Truly I am full of the power by the Spirit of the Lord”

([chap. iii. 8](#)). Of John the Baptist it is written, that he should be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb—[Luke i. 15](#). Even the Lord Himself was filled with the Holy Spirit, whom He received without measure. That Spirit came upon Him at Jordan, how then could He be spoken of as still to come?—a question all the more puzzling since we read that in the evening of the resurrection Jesus breathed upon His disciples, saying “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” ([John xx. 22](#)).

It has been necessary to present this large series of testimonies to show our readers the difficulty of the problem which we will endeavor to solve in the next article.



XXV.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Other than in the Old.

“By His Spirit which dwelleth in you.”—*Rom. viii. 11.*

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In order to understand the change inaugurated on Pentecost we must distinguish between the various ways in which the Holy Ghost enters into relationship with the creature.

With the Christian Church we confess that the Holy Spirit is true and eternal God, and therefore omnipresent; hence no creature, stone or animal, man or angel, is excluded from His presence.

With reference to His omniscience and omnipresence, David sings: “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me.” These words state positively that omnipresence belongs to the Holy Spirit; that neither in heaven nor in hell, in the east nor in the west, is there a spot or point from which He is excluded.

This simple consideration is, for the matter under discussion, of the greatest importance; for it follows that the Holy Spirit can not be said ever to have moved from one place to another; to have been among Israel, but not among the nations; to have been present after the day of Pentecost where He was not before. All such representations directly oppose the confession of His omnipresence, eternity, and immutability. The Omnipresent One can not go from one place to another, for He can not come where He is already. And to suppose that He is omnipresent at one time and not at another is inconsistent with His eternal Godhead. The testimony of John the Baptist, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode on Him,” and that of St. Luke, “The Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the Word,” may not therefore be understood as tho the Holy Spirit came to a place where He was not before, which is impossible.

However—and this is the first distinction which will throw light upon the matter—David’s description of omnipresence applies to *local presence in space*, but not to *the world of spirits*.

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We know not what spirits are, nor what our own spirit is. In the body we can distinguish between nerves and blood, bones and muscles, and we know something of their functions in the organism; but how a spirit exists, moves, and works, we can not tell. We only know that it exists, moves, and works in an entirely different way from that of the body. When a brother dies nobody opens a door or window for the exit of the soul; for we know that neither wall nor ceiling can hinder it in its heavenward flight. In prayer we whisper so as not to be overheard; yet we believe that the man Jesus Christ hears every word. The swiftness