

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter | 2026
By Fr. Hayden A. Butler

The Gospel Lesson for this morning builds upon last week's Lesson concerning Christ's ascension to the throne of heaven and His promise to send the Holy Spirit to the disciples. In this, the Lord promises to give us what is most precious to Him, the complete self-giving love of His Father. This morning reveals that the gifts God wishes to give His Church far exceed what we would think is reasonable to ask; God's goodness is more and better than what we imagine or seek. What may seem at first the impending absence of Christ from His disciples will be revealed as the gift of a closeness and fullness greater than they would have thought possible.

The Gospels bear witness to the Father giving the Spirit to His Son. At the Jordan River, when Jesus was baptized, the Father sent the Spirit upon His Son, revealing His Son to be His Beloved on the earth, in whom He is well-pleased. In this, though, we are made to see what has been true in the communion of the Holy Trinity from all eternity: how the Father pours out all of Himself in love for His Son, how the Son pours out all of Himself in love for His Father, and how the Spirit contains all of that outpoured love, emptying Himself of all to the Father and Son so that He can bear all they have to give. Only the Spirit can be the complete love of the Father and the Son; only He is able to search and know the whole Person of the Father and the Son to bear all the gifts of their love. And it is that Spirit that the Lord wants to give His disciples, to bestow on them the same all-knowing closeness as is only known in the life of God from within His eternal life.

We remember, too, how all of Christ's trials in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, and on the Cross, were accomplished in the fullness of the Father's love through the Spirit. His trials were not qualifying events to prove Himself worthy of that love; they were little apocalypses that unveiled a love that had always been there, that never was not. As Christ prepared to send His apostles out into the world to continue His ministry, so He prepared them to receive that same gift of fullness and presence out of which His teachings, commandments, and signs had been manifested. As of yet, they were still bound up in the notion that God was separated from them, that there was a world apart from Him in which they toiled through sleepless nights to subsist, that there were storms that threatened about which He was indifferent, that there were violent powers under which they were helpless captives. All of these illusions of separation were the reasons why, despite His desire, Christ could not teach them all that He wished. Only after He had triumphed through the Cross over the world, the flesh, and the devil, over sin and death, only after He had proved these things by Himself could they be led into the fullness of His truth.

Yet the prospect of the Spirit's coming was already formidable, for with His arrival would come the full indictment of this petty world and all the ways it tries to live without God. The Spirit likewise searches the full content of every thought, word, and deed in every place at every time,

rendering with the swiftness of a thought a full report on the substance of every life, every vice and virtue, every mixed or hidden motive. The arrival of God's greatest gift to us would also reveal every lesser thing in us, allowing us to be purified, the eyes of our understanding opened. We see this tension in the Gospels whenever the apostles venture to ask Christ for something, whether it is a seat in His court, safety in their fear, or judgment on their enemies. In the moment they ask, and He responds, it reveals how abundant is the generosity and scope of God's bounty and how impoverished is our imagination for the good we might seek from Him.

And this is why we begin now to prepare for the great feast of Pentecost ahead, through which we will be renewed in the gift of the Spirit given to us. The central question we are asked this morning is whether we are prepared to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, or are we still seeking lesser gifts to sustain our illusions of separation from God. For it is possible even for devout Christians to seek to keep the God who is Love itself at bay, to ask for favors, trinkets, and talismans to prop up our little lives, to adorn our exiled humanity with nostalgic mementos of home. Instead, the Lord wishes to give us the Giver of Life itself, the bearer of eternal love, and the one who before even the first trial has overcome the whole world, claiming it for the Kingdom.

Despite the grandeur of the gift, though, the Lessons today are clear that our participation in the Spirit's conviction of the world is accomplished through our humble and ordinary faithfulness to Christ. As St. James writes, "receive with meekness the word engrafted within you, which is able to save your souls." Through this reception, we become like the Persons of the Trinity whose fellowship is opened to us. In pouring our whole selves out in love for them, they will pour all of themselves out in love for us. Our meek receptivity to Christ—that humble willingness to hear and receive Him into all of who we are—is the foundation of our membership in His Body and our usefulness in His mission. If we really want to love and serve Christ, we must begin again in His love, which is also the love of the Father, which is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. We always begin in the fullness of God, and out of that fullness, we can do all that He commands and calls us to do. For, as Jesus said to His disciples: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."