

This week is New Jersey's Primary election, where we will vote to determine who will be running for Governor in the fall. We've been getting calls from the candidates or supporters of the candidates to encourage us to vote for them – all automated, of course. There seems to be a big difference between the incumbent governor, who is running for re-election and his two main challengers on the other side. However, as with a lot of things, sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between the candidates, even with a scorecard.

As we look around us there a lot of different religions and faiths out there. To some, they are all the same. Yes, there are different beliefs... different practices... but generally, many lump them all in one boat with thoughts like - "there's only one God - we just all approach him differently, but we're all trying to get to the same place." For example, Mitch Romney, who is backing one of the candidates, is a Mormon, and they present themselves as another branch of Christianity. We know they are not.

There is a difference, as we know, between Biblical Christianity and with all the other religions and faiths in the world — and part of that difference is what we celebrate remembering the events of this day.

Today is Pentecost Sunday — also known as Whitsunday. Whitsunday is a contraction of White Sunday — because on this day new converts were often baptized — and they wore white garments. Today is the day when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on those first Christians following the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read about this in Acts 2, a few minutes ago, which was a fulfillment of that which we read in our Old Testament lesson from Joel. Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of the promise of our Savior that we read in our Gospel lesson this morning from John 14 — turn with me there. We can say without hesitation that what is remembered today — and which continues to go on — is one of the things that separates Christianity from all the other religions in the world. It is only Christianity that has the person and work of the Holy Spirit — the 3rd person of the Trinity.

Prior to the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would come and go — as needed — in the lives of God's people. That is why David would pray in Psalm 51:11: "*Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*" But Jesus promised his Apostles — and us — that when he went away — that is, when he ascended into heaven, he would send "*another Helper.*"

The facts about the life of Christ are there. Most people recognize the fact that Jesus was a historical person — that he was born, lived and died — about 2000 years ago. These are historically verifiable facts that have been written about even in secular sources. We know that this is what the Bible tells us — along with items such as the Virgin Birth, his resurrection and his ascension.

But it is not belief in these facts that save us. Many people believe that Jesus existed... many people believe that he was a real person. But, the Scriptures teach us that even the devils believe, and they tremble — because of one specific fact. They do not have the Holy Spirit living within them.

You can believe all the historical facts about the Jesus, God, the Bible that you want — but if you don't have the Holy Spirit you cannot be a Christian. Romans 8:9 says: "*Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*"

You see, we know that when one trusts in Christ as Savior, it is because the Holy Spirit has regenerated the heart so that one can come to faith in Christ. The Bible teaches that the person who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior is dead — spiritually dead.

And so unless the Holy Spirit first moves in a persons heart — and makes it alive — one cannot respond to the gospel message. So the Holy Spirit is essential to our salvation. It won't happen without him.

But as we think of the Holy Spirit — we find that he often gets the short stick — if you will — in terms of our study and of learning more about him. We speak often of God... we speak often of Jesus. And yet we believe in the Trinity... three persons... one God — and so I'd like to look at the person of the Holy Spirit for the next few minutes — again looking at our Gospel passage from John 14 and elsewhere in the Scriptures.

First, we see that the Holy Spirit is a person. John 14:16: *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper”* Notice that he says *another Helper* — Jesus does not say a different Helper, but *another Helper* — meaning one like he is. We know that Jesus was a person, and if the Holy Spirit is like him, then he must be a person also. He obviously does not have flesh & bone — but then neither does God — but there still is personality there — that is, having the characteristics of a person — emotion, intellect, etc.

We see this in the Scriptures as we read that personal attributes are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. John 14:26: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ... notice the personal pronoun — He will teach. In John 15:26 we read: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. Again, notice, He will testify of Me.*

Romans 8:26 says: *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”... the Spirit Himself.* In 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Apostle Paul in talking about the distribution of spiritual gifts says: *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

And there are others, but further proof is seen in the description of the Holy Spirit's relationship between the Father and the Son. In the great commission in Matthew 28:19 we read: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”* This is the formula that we use to this day for Baptism — but notice the equality — and again, it is something only Christianity has.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, we read of all three persons of the Trinity being active in the lives of Christians: *“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”*

In a benediction at the close of 2nd Corinthians — one that we still use today — we read: 14 *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. And in 1 Peter 1:1,2 we see the work of the Trinity in our salvation: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:”*

So we see beyond doubt that the Holy Spirit is a person inseparably connected to God the Father and God the

Son — therefore he must also be divine — because they are both divine — part of the Godhead.

In Acts 5 we read the story of Ananias and Sapphira who sold a piece of land, but kept back part of the proceeds, we read: Acts 5:3,4: “*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."* Again, notice the equality — lying to the Holy Spirit and to God are one in the same.

In Acts 28:25 we read: “*So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers..."* We know that in the book of Isaiah the Lord speaks directly to Isaiah, but here we see that the Holy Spirit is that which spoke through Isaiah.

In addition, divine attributes are given to the Holy Spirit, such as eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. We see this in verses such as 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11: “*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*”

Hebrews 9:14 tells us of the Holy Spirit’s eternity: “*how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*”

Time does not permit us to look at more, but not only are divine attributes ascribed to the Holy Spirit, but also divine works. Matthew 12:18: “*Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.*” Jesus said in Luke 4:18: “*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;*”

And in 1 Peter 1:12 we read: “*To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into.*” I know that I’ve quoted a lot of Scriptures, but I believe that the Bible is its own best interpreter. It is best to go the source!

Now, as I have said, we could go on — indeed volumes have been written — but the point is that all three persons are equal — that is why we say: “*God the Father... God the Son... God the Holy Ghost.*” And yet there are not three Gods — there is one God — in three persons.

Hard to comprehend — yes. If anyone says they completely understand the relationship in the Trinity — they are lying — or at least they think they know more than they really do — because to totally understand the Trinity is beyond our finite comprehension.

But we do see this equality in the way that the Spirit comes. Notice the words of Jesus: “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper...*” The more literal translation of “*I pray*” is “*I will request*” — so what do we see — we see that the Holy Spirit is given by the Father at the request of the Son.

He proceeds from both the Father and the Son. You might say, wait a second — that sounds familiar. It should — we confess it each week in the Nicene Creed: *“And I believe the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son...”*

All this is great — in that it helps us to further understand the person of the Holy Spirit. But what does that do for us? Again, we look at our verse: *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever...”* We see that Holy Spirit is called *another Helper*. The original word is Paraclete — a legal term — with the meaning of one who stands along side of, or one is called to the side of — with the specific purpose of helping.

This “helping” takes many forms. He definitely is one who comforts. In fact, some translations translate “Helper” by “Comforter.” And as we read this chapter we see that this is true — Jesus is preparing his Apostles for his death — and he is trying to comfort them. This is one of the specific jobs of the Holy Spirit.

We see also the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. In the next chapter, Jesus expands on this — *“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me...”* We know the truth of the Gospel because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

But we also see more — John 14:26: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”* — it is the Holy Spirit that helps us to remember the things that we have learned... it is the Holy Spirit that keeps us faithful to God and his Word — and the truth that is in it. We can witness to the truth of the Gospel because of the Holy Spirit.

This is person and work of the Holy Spirit — but we see one other important thing: Jesus said: *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever;”* People often say: I wish that I was alive at the time of Jesus... or I wish I could have been with Jesus or some variation of that.

But as we think about that we realize that Jesus was only on this earth for three short years — but look at what he says about the Holy Spirit — *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever;” ... that He may abide with you forever.* The Christian has the Holy Spirit living within them — one that does not leave... one that will not go away.

This is the promise that we have from our Savior — the promise that was fulfilled on that first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on all the believers. As we think about what God has given us — we remember his promise: In 2 Peter 2:3 we read: *“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...”* God has given us all things that we need in order to live our lives in the world that He has created.

And part of that provision is the person and work of the Holy Spirit — that lives in each and every one of us... and it is that which separates Christianity from the myriad of other religions that exist.

So let us be thankful and think of the Holy Spirit — and what he means to us as Christians – because aside from the person and work of Jesus Christ, only Christianity has the person of the Holy Spirit.