

“Are you ready to suffer?” John 14:8-17

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Today we celebrate the birthday of the Church. The birthday of the Christian church, the day when the promised Helper, the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles, and when they gave Him to more than 3000 people by baptizing them and teaching them what Jesus had commanded.

Today we are in God’s house. In God’s presence. In time and place where the Holy God Himself comes to us to be among us and to bless us. Quite often people think that this is some kind of good work, to come to the service. And once they have come, they can boast in their hearts about how good a work they have done.

How should we come in God’s presence? Proud about our goodness? No! On our knees, or falling on the ground on our faces. If we realize where we are, in whose presence we have come, we should bow down, we should kneel in awe.

This is the presence of God. The presence of the Holy God who sees our hearts. Who knows everything. Who dwells in an unapproachable light, outside of time and outside of space. The Almighty judge of our hearts.

Just picture for a minute that the cover of your flesh is stripped away and that all your thoughts, all your desires, everything is revealed. And not only these that we have right now, but our whole lives. All of it. Till the last ugly and shameful secret. All is put in open, in light... no hiding anymore.

Would we still boast that we have done a good work coming into God’s presence? And what would the Holy God say about our hidden thoughts? What would His verdict about our life be?

Do you know what He says when He sees our rebellion, our selfishness, our arrogance, our wickedness? “I forgive you. I want you to be my child. I want you to be a member of my family. I want you to inherit my kingdom.

I will help you. I will give you the Helper. The Holy Spirit. He will dwell with you. He will change your heart. He will restore a clean heart to you. He will bring you closer to me. Come and receive my forgiveness!”

If only we spend a little time reflecting on our hearts, words and actions in the light of God’s holy Commandments, the Holy Spirit helps us to see as in a mirror, what we are like. And it is not a pretty sight. When stripped from all covers, our hearts are not exactly places of beauty and purity.

God’s ways are not our ways. When He sees us as we are, instead of being just, He is merciful, He forgives us all our sins and gives us His Spirit. And why do we need God’s Spirit? Because this is how He creates a new heart in us.

God the Creator does everything by His Word and the Spirit. He created everything by His Word and the Spirit, and He renews, restores His fallen creation, His little, rebellious creatures by the same Word and the same Spirit.

Luther summarized it so wonderfully in the Small Catechism. “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified me and kept me in the true faith.”

Your faith, your ability to trust Jesus Christ, to belong to Him as to your Lord, is the work of the Holy Spirit. No the Holy Spirit, no Christians. The Holy Spirit creates our faith, when we hear God’s message about our sinfulness and God’s underserved grace.

The Holy Spirit delivers to us Jesus’ forgiveness. He gives us life. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation”. The Holy Spirit is given to us as God’s guarantee until we receive our eternal inheritance with our Lord Jesus.

The Holy Spirit assures us that we, indeed, are God’s children. The heirs of God the Father and co-heirs with Jesus. These are such a great things. So incomprehensibly great and mysterious.

For our God is incomprehensibly great and merciful. We deserve none of it. We have merited none of it. We could dare to hope for none of it. What He gives us defeats our reason.

Instead of God’s judgment we receive His forgiveness, instead of God’s wrath we receive His grace, mercy and love. All of this because God’s judgment and wrath

were put on Jesus Christ. He took our place, He receive in full what we, you and me justly deserve. And instead He gives us His Spirit, He makes us His children.

How do we receive the Holy Spirit? We read that the apostles received it in quite a remarkable way. That was impressive. But we can also read a few verses later, in the second chapter of Acts how the Holy Spirit was given to others.

In a very simple and ordinary way. By preaching of the Gospel and by baptism and the Holy Communion. How did Luther put it in the Small Catechism? “I believe that ... the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified me and kept me in the true faith.” Yes, but it is not impressive. There is no glory or miraculous signs and wonders. There are no escalated emotions and mysterious experiences.

Only Word of God. The Gospel about God’s undeserved grace. Preached by a fallen and imperfect human being, your pastor. Baptism. Water together with the Word of God, with His command and promise. The Holy Communion. Bread and wine, which we eat and drink according to the Lord’s command and promise. These are the means of the Holy Spirit.

Very ordinary. Very simply. Very humble means. But through these means the greatest and the most important gifts of gracious and loving Father are given to His rebellious, but beloved children.

Through these ordinary things, water, word, bread and wine you receive the Holy Spirit, you receive the forgiveness of all your sins and eternal life. You can say that in the Lord’s Supper, when you eat and drink Jesus body and blood, you eat and drink also the Holy Spirit. You eat and drink forgiveness and eternal life.

By eating Jesus’ body and blood in the Holy Sacrament you eat and drink the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. There may not be outward glory and splendour, but just think how comforting and assuring it is.

How do you know that you have receive and keep receiving the Holy Spirit? Because I was baptized. Because I listen to my pastor preaching about God’s undeserved grace. Because I eat and drink forgiveness and eternal life with the holy body and blood of my Lord in the Sacrament.

Your loving God has arranged everything so that you not only can receive His gifts, but also so that you can be assured that you have received and keep receiving them. You may not see heaven open at your baptism. Or you may see them.

You may not fall on the ground when you hear the mighty and powerful Word of God. You may not experience ecstatic emotions when you receive the Holy Communion... I you don’t care. For you don’t need to.

You felt water in your baptism. You heard God's promise. You hear the message that your pastor preach, and these are words of your God. You receive and taste and smell the bread and wine in the Holy Communion, and you know that Jesus delivers you what He has promised – forgiveness and eternal life.

We are so blessed. We are so privileged. We need to be so humbled. Our God doesn't deal with us justly. He gives us what His beloved and holy Son deserves. He loves us as His beloved and perfect children.

He does it, for all the just anger and punishment for our sins, for mine and for yours, was put on Jesus Christ. What a wonderful exchange!

The last thing. How are we to live once we have received this underserved grace and mercy of our God? Some falsely consider that if God forgives us even if we don't deserve, then we don't even need to care how we live.

It is such a foolish thinking. If there is a person whom you have terribly hurt, but he still graciously forgives you, do you think right away that because he forgave me, I can continue in the same way. Of course not. And the same is true with our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does He expect from us? As Paul wrote in Romans, all these wonderful gifts of God will remain yours "provided we suffer with Jesus in order that we may also be glorified with him." (Rom 8:17) Suffer?

What does this mean? You remember that Jesus was glorified only after His sufferings and death, and not before. In this life He lived in total obedience to His Father and self-sacrificially serving others. He wasn't concerned about Himself, He wasn't focusing on Himself.

The same God expects from us. As Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." This is what God expects from us. The same commandments which we so easily tend to forget. Fear, love and trust God more than anything and anyone, and love your neighbour as yourself. We have it explained well in the 10 Commandments.

If you love God, if you love Jesus your Saviour, who took your place and received what your sins deserve, you will keep His commandments. This is how we suffer as Christians.

Every day, and especially on Sundays, we are to fight against our selfish desires to do what we want, and to try to keep our Lord's Commandments. Every day we are to fight against our laziness and indifference towards the Word of God, and to try to find a time to read God's message to us and to grow in His wisdom, so that we can share the Gospel about God's forgiveness with those who are still under the power of Satan.

Every day we are to fight our self-centredness as we try to listen to our Lord and consider others as more important, and to try to love them with words and selfless actions. When you try to do all of this, you will suffer.

Our old self will resist to the Holy Spirit and to the Word and will fight against God's will. Our old self will try to persuade us that we can be great Christians even if we ignore what our Lord commands.

That we are already enlightened enough and don't need to waste our precious time reading this old book which is hard to understand anyway. Our old self will try to convince us that first we need to take care of ourselves, to secure our future.

We need to have all that we may possibly need for our lives and then to have more, and then to have saving in case if anything goes wrong and then... only then, if such a day ever comes, only then we can focus on others.

Our old self can be very convincing. It is hard to resist him on our own. Therefore to live as Christians we need all the help we can get. We need to use every chance to receive the Holy Spirit.

Every Divine Service, every sermon, every time the Holy Communion is offered, every time there is opportunity to study God's word. The battle with our old self is what we need to suffer if we want to make to God's Kingdom.

How can we do it? How can we look away from ourselves and look at Christ and look at our neighbour instead? It is quite simple. Remember the Holy Spirit. When you receive Him regularly, He helps and He assures you that you are beloved child of Almighty God.

He assures you of God's love and then you desire to be with you Lord Jesus. He assures you that your present and your future are secure in the hand of your Heavenly Father, that He is faithful and will provide for you and will protect you.

He helps you to see that true peace and joy is found resting in the presence of holy God and in self-sacrificial service to your neighbour. This is what the Holy Spirit does. This is how He creates the Church and restores the fallen world. This is how He will bring you in God's Kingdom, as you allow Him to come to you.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep your hearts and thoughts in Jesus Christ.

Amen.