

“Living in two realities” John 15:26-27, 16:12-15

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. [...] “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

We cannot even comprehend how unique we are! Just look around you! What do you see? Do you see something surprising, something extraordinary? Look again! Look at the people next to you, in front of you, behind you!

So... what do you see? Nothing shocking... nothing breath taking... Just people. As I said, we cannot even comprehend how unique we are, for our senses are incapable of revealing it to us. Do you know who sits next to you? Who are these people?

They are God’s chosen people. I mean God who created this vast Universe where our own planet Earth is just a little speck among myriads and myriads of heavenly bodies. He has chosen you, before the foundation of the world. You are people with God’s own Spirit in you.

Yes, you are God’s temple, this is how our God Himself speaks about you. You are His temple, for He Himself indwells in you. When you arrive at your congregation, or when you see other Christians, you should exclaim with awe and excitement:

“Look, look at these people – they have the Spirit of the holy God in them. They have direct connection with the eternal and all-powerful Being, and they call Him their Father; and He calls them – His beloved children, His heirs.”

This is who you are. This is who you truly are. This is how you should think about one another and about yourself. This is you! We, Christians, we are so unique, we are so incredibly extra-ordinary beings.

We live in this world, in this reality, but we also belong to another world, the Kingdom of God. We live our lives as everyone else, but we wait for the inheritance that is prepared for us in the age to come. We will die, but we will live forever.

We belong to the human race, but we are members of God’s own family. We look like everyone else, but the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and joy and peace and life, eternal life, this Spirit dwell in us. He dwells in you.

Today we remember the giving of the Holy Spirit, or the coming of the Holy Spirit upon God's chosen people. And I would like to invite you to reflect on the mystery of Christian faith, on the mystery of being Christians so that we can appreciate more and more heartedly what an incredible gift we have received from our God.

I would say that to be a Christian, to have Christian faith is about living in two realities at once. Belonging to two realities at once. What do I mean by this? Let's reflect on this physical reality first. And this one is very important.

You may have heard society speaking dismissively about Christians, as if we believed some fairy tales and naïve stories from ancient past, not fitting for this time and age. But this is simply not true.

Which event – event! – stands at the very centre of Christian faith? We could say – Jesus' event – His conception, birth, life, ministry of teaching and healing, ministry full of signs and wonders, and then His sufferings, His crucifixion, His death and resurrection, His appearance to His disciple and then finally His ascension, His return back to God's reality inaccessible to our senses.

See, this is how Christian faith differs from any other faith system. Ours is rooted in real historical events, in something that happened among us, that was experienced and witnessed by hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses, and then recorded for the sake of posterity by those Christian eyewitnesses, but also by many secular historians of that time.

As far as we focus on these events, we should not even speak much about Christian faith. It is about knowing the history, about knowing the testimonies of eyewitnesses, about what happened. These historical facts are available to every inquiring soul.

Everyone can go and examine those facts to see that they are true and correct description of what happened two millennia ago. This man Jesus from Nazareth indeed lived. He gathered disciples, He taught, and He did unbelievable things.

Things which scared those who witnessed them. They struggled to believe their eyes. He healed everyone who was brought to Him, He cast out unclean spirits, occasionally He fed multitudes, He raised the dead and showed that He is in control even over the forces of creation. He claimed to be one with God, to be His Son.

He repeatedly foretold His sufferings, death and resurrection. He said that He had to do it for our sake, to deliver us from our ultimate enemies, from sin and death, and to give us life that will never end. He said that He would endure that for us, for you.

Then He willingly delivered Himself into the hands of His enemies to be executed ... innocent. He died naked tied to the cross, nails piercing His hands and feet. But then, on the third day, He came back from the dead. Alive. Even more, full of life.

In new resurrected body. He appeared to His followers. One time to more than five hundred of eyewitnesses at once. All these are events. They happened. They were witnessed by many, by friends and enemies alike. They were recorded for our sake. They are all about this reality, about our history. This is simply about bearing witness about what happened. And these events, attested by so many, for centuries scrutinized and examined under the microscope of human disbelief, they form the foundation for our Christian faith. A very strong foundation.

Or we could say that knowing these facts open for us doors into God's reality. But that is only the beginning. And this is where we can start reflecting more specifically on what the Holy Spirit does. So far, we simply described historical events of which Christian Church is bearing witness to the world.

But what happens when we witness about these events? What happens when the world hears about Jesus' event? As Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgement.

How does this happen? When you tell to someone what God has done for them in Jesus, as we just reflected, the Holy Spirit uses your testimony to convict the world concerning sin. A very specific sin. The root of every other sin. Unbelief.

Our unbelief sent Jesus to the cross. It is not a pleasant thought. But Jesus' story also convicts us of our righteousness. What does that mean? Those who resisted Jesus, who captured, and tortured Him and demanded His death, they believed that they were doing the right thing.

As do many today, who mock Christianity, who caricature Christian faith, who blame the Church for all the evils of human race. They too believe to be doing the right thing, being righteous. But Jesus' resurrection convicts the world.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father vindicated Jesus and His claims that He is truly the Son of God, the Eternal Word, the Wisdom of God. So also today, Jesus' resurrection convicts the world of their self-righteousness and foreshadows the day of judgment, when the Son of God will return in His divine glory.

This is what the Holy Spirit does, He convicts the world through our testimonies. And then there are only two possible outcomes. One is what happened with apostles Peter and John before Jewish leaders. They told what God has done through Jesus, and "when they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them." (Act 5:33)

The other possible outcome is what happened on the day of Pentecost. When people had heard Peter's testimony, "they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

You see, the Holy Spirit had convinced them that what Jesus had done, He had done for them, and they were ready to receive God grace. Peter said: "Repent and be

baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:37-38) Not much has changed since. We are still sent as Jesus witnesses to proclaim those historical events that took place two millennia ago. The Holy Spirit is still at work convicting the world, and we can still see either one or another outcome.

Either people get angry and don’t want to hear about Jesus, and don’t want to see His messengers, or they are cut to the heart and ask: “Brother, sister, what shall we do?” To which we can joyfully reply: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Lucky you, Brothers and Sisters, for you received the Holy Spirit and didn’t reject Him. You trusted that what Jesus has done, He has done for you. Now the Spirit has brought you to participate in God’s reality, that begins already now, but will be fully revealed when Jesus returns.

It is our participation in God’s reality, the Holy Spirit in us, that makes us so unique and our lives so beautiful and enriching. Yes, we still live in this reality, but now we are able to look at one another and marvel, to see ourselves for who we truly are – God’s chosen people with God’s Spirit in them.

We can see this world with different eyes, as wonderfully created but corrupted by sin. We can see every human being as infinitely precious in God’s eyes – for Jesus gave up His life for them as well. We can see our lives as exciting journeys as we are invited to participate in God’s work of creation – caring for all people in our lives, and in His work of redemption, as we serve as His witnesses.

And in the midst of this life’s trials and sufferings, we can lift our heads high and focus on the living hope, on the eternal inheritance that is already prepared for us in New Heavens and New Earth. We know what is to come. We know that the evil one has been defeated. We know that justice and goodness with triumph.

And when it happens, we will see our Lord and God Jesus Christ as He is. This is what the Holy Spirit has done for you. He has brought you in this new reality, in God’s beautiful reality, and He enables you to rejoice in it already now.

There is no greater gift than this. May the Spirit of God keep you in this true faith, may He shelter you from all doubt and temptations, and may He lead you to the destination of all God’s people, everlasting blessedness and joy.

Amen.