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“Terrified by the grandeur!” Acts 2:32-41

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Did you see what just happened? In the very beginning of this Service? Do you realize the grandeur of what we just witnessed? Something truly remarkable. Sure, there was nothing that impressive as far as our physical senses are concerned.

I guess we didn't see or hear or feel anything extraordinary. Just a simple rite of Holy Baptism. Some water poured. Some words said. Some promises made. Simple things. Seemingly... But... May the Lord of the Church enlighten us with His Word and Spirit so that we can reflect and be amazed for what just happened!

Do we realize how far reaching the consequences of this simple rite are? The Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit just made His promise to this little boy. As we make certain promises before God and this congregation, so our God made His.

Just a few minutes ago the Triune God declared: “I make you my child now. I welcome you as my son. I embrace you with my Spirit. You are my family now. And as years and decades go nothing will change my commitment to you, and I will never ever abandon you, and I will never ever give up on you. Whatever happens. I solemnly promise!”

This promise changes everything, it gives us a new identity, new life, safe haven in God's presence. Besides, now this child does not belong to this crooked generation anymore, his citizenship in the Kingdom of God, that is the future that awaits him.

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And sure, this is not the end of the road, this is only the beginning. Now it is about many years of discipleship, learning everything that Jesus commanded us and living out this new identity of child of God every day, fighting the good fight till the end.

So, yes, those are incredible gifts of God that He gives us in Holy Baptism. The greatest and the farthest-reaching gifts, and we should be in utter awe and wonder because of the grandeur of what we just witnessed. If only that truly sunk in...

Because this is true for each one of you as well, for each of you who are baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. He has given the same wonderful gifts and promises to you. He has adopted you as His child. He has given you His Spirit.

He has forgiven you all your sins. He has prepared for you a place in New Heavens and New Earth. He has committed to you; He will never abandon you and He will never ever give up on you whatever may happen in your life. This is true for you too.

If that really sunk in, we would be overjoyed and at peace in our Father's strong arms, we would not forget or neglect such a gift, and whatever happens, we would always run back to God our Father and allow Him to hug us and to squeeze all the guilt and shame out of us. May He help us with that!

We just heard this reading from the book of Acts, chapter 2. From apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. It is quite helpful to us as we reflect on how God engages with us, how He comes to each one of us, how He invites us and cares for us.

It's interesting. All those people who were there. All those thousands, they had heard what had happened in Jerusalem. They had heard about Jesus from Nazareth, how He had been going around preaching, teaching, healing everyone, performing miraculous displays or His power, things that cried out His divinity.

Thousands and thousands had witnessed Jesus' extraordinary ministry. But somehow, they hadn't paid much attention. It is often similar for us. Most people know about Jesus, about those events, for they stand in the very center of time. That is literally how the entire world counts time. From the birth of Jesus.

And still somehow those events seem irrelevant. We remain untouched in our hearts. What has that to do with me? How can we even know that all of that is true? Why should I waste my time and energy thinking about it?

But then, the Spirit of the Holy God descends on us and shakes our reality. We hear His voice speaking to us: **"Know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."** This Jesus whom you crucified...

Those thousands could have objected: "We didn't crucify Him! We were not even there." We could object too: "We didn't crucify Him; we were not even born." But we

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did crucify Him, for those were our rebellious, unbelieving, our self-centered, self-important and arrogant hearts that put Jesus on the cross. We did it. Me and you. And now God has made Him, this Jesus, both Lord and Christ. The Judge of humanity.

When God's voice speaks to us this harsh truth, and when His gracious Spirit descends on us and enlightens us, we begin to recognize that all of that is not only real and true but also of greatest significance in our lives. We are cut to the heart.

Just as those thousands were as they cried out: **“Brothers, what shall we do?”** What shall we do? This Jesus now is the Lord! **“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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”**

And with many other words [Peter] bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

See, as soon as we head to the voice of God, as soon as we are ready to listen, He pours His gifts over us without any hesitation. “Come, for I want to forgive you! Come, I will gift you with my Holy Spirit! Come for I long to bless you and your children! Come for I want to save you from this crooked generation! Come to me!”

What an event that first Pentecost was! 3000 responding to God's invitation and getting baptised in one day! What a miracle! Sure, sure. Big numbers. Sounds quite impressive. But is it really that impressive? There is something that we tend to forget about the Church of Christ. And, on the one hand, that is understandable. We usually perceive this world through our senses.

How do you perceive the Church? What image pops up in your mind when you hear the words “the Church of Jesus Christ”? We may picture our congregations. We may picture majestic church buildings that we can see all around the world.

For some their imagination may be more shaped by the critical attitudes from the secular culture, which depicts the Church as those radicals, sometimes naïve, sometimes bigoted and hateful, as some strange remains from times long gone.

How do you picture the Church? Whichever way we picture it, it is almost certain that we do not get it right. Our senses, whatever we have seen and experienced in this world, can't possibly offer us an adequate picture of the Church of Christ.

Today we witnessed a little boy being baptized in an ordinary congregation. One little boy. That's all. What we didn't see with our eyes was that this little boy was just made a part of this magnificent eternal community. What community? This one!

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“Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb [...] and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” [...] They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” That is the Church of Christ! Countless multitudes!

Today we witnessed one baptism. On Pentecost it was 3000. Today, and I mean on this day, there are tens of thousands of baptisms taking place. Tens of thousands! In one day! New Christians. New citizens of God’s Kingdom. New brothers and sisters! That is what the Church of Christ is like!

While living in this world we may be impressed by the grandeur of many things we see around us. Human achievements, technology, architectural marvels, wealth, huge cities, and so on and on. Impressive, eye and attention catching, glorious. Sure...

But whatever exists in this age, whatever impressive or trustworthy it may appear at any given moment, all the glory and splendour of this world will soon disappear. Many things are withering and disappearing right before our eyes. We know that.

But there will be things that remain. Forever. This magnificent community, the Church of Jesus Christ, those great multitudes from every age and every corner of the world. They will remain forever. Little baptized babies. Faithful parents putting in their imperfect efforts, trying to do their best. Small and ordinary Christian communities. People of all walks of life in the pews. You. You will remain. For you are a part of that grand, eternal community of God’s people.

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” For everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself. He has called you. Yes, He did. You are here.

Now marvel at the grace that is given to you. Rejoice in the wonderful divine gifts that your Father in heaven has granted to you. Be grateful for His faithfulness to His promises even when we let Him down, even when we fail to keep our promises.

And above all remember who you are. A Baptized child of God. Safely resting in your Father's arms. A citizen of God’s Kingdom. A co-heir with Jesus Christ. Your future hope is breath-taking. New Heavens and New Earth. With Risen Lord Jesus. Remember this and be thankful.

Amen.