

SESSION SEVEN THE APOSTLES' CREED (III)

While he was still with them, Jesus promised his disciples (followers) that after he departed, his Father in heaven would send them the Holy Spirit to guide them. Then, after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, his disciples stayed in Jerusalem, praying together every day and waiting for this promise to be fulfilled.

Acts 2:1-4 describes what happened next:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The Jewish festival of Pentecost came fifty days after Passover (when Jesus died and rose again). Likewise, the Christian Feast of Pentecost comes fifty days after Easter. It is called “the birthday of the Church” because the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to preach the Gospel (Good News) of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The Third Article of the Creed describes the work of the Holy Spirit:

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Some notes on each of these lines follow below.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Holy Trinity. We typically experience the Holy Spirit at work within us. One traditional way of expressing this is that the Holy Spirit “enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.” The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of faith and brings us into a living relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit empowers us to follow Jesus and carry out the Church’s mission in the world. We receive the Holy Spirit at Baptism, and the strengthening of the Spirit’s gifts at Confirmation. But the Holy Spirit also works in countless other ways, often unexpected and unpredictable.

The holy Catholic Church

The Church is the community that the Holy Spirit brings into being. The “four marks of the Church” are One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic:

- One – Despite outward divisions between different denominations, the Church is inwardly one, consisting of all baptized Christians
- Holy – Means “set apart for God”
- Catholic – Means “universal” or “worldwide.” Also means “complete” or “whole,” teaching the whole faith. (The Roman Catholic Church is part of the Catholic Church, and so is the Episcopal Church.)
- Apostolic – Means “sent.” The Church continues the apostles’ mission to preach the Gospel to all nations and peoples

The Communion of Saints

In this context, the Communion means “fellowship” or “community.” Saints means “holy ones.” The Church exists in three states or dimensions:

- The Church Militant – the Church in this world
- The Church Expectant – the Souls of departed Christians who are still in a process of growth and purification in their continuing journey towards perfection
- The Church Triumphant – the Saints in Heaven, who have completed the journey into the fullness of God’s presence

We pray for one another in the Church Militant. We pray for the faithful departed in the Church Expectant. The Saints in the Church Triumphant pray for them and for us. This fellowship of prayer is what is meant by the Communion of Saints.

The Forgiveness of Sins

Christians are not (yet) perfect, but are forgiven. We need to forgive one another as God has forgiven us. “Please be patient, God isn’t finished with me yet.”

The Resurrection of the Body

Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so Christians believe that at the end of the world God will raise us from the dead in new spiritual bodies. Our prayer for the departed is that they may “rest in peace and rise in glory.” (When we die and go to heaven, we do not become angels, who are created spirits without bodies.)

The Life Everlasting

The Christian hope is for eternal life with the Holy Trinity in the presence of all the angels and saints.

QUIZ

Match the following lines of the Apostles Creed with the corresponding days in the Church Calendar:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Crucified, died, and was buried | a. Easter Sunday |
| 2. the Communion of Saints | b. Feast of the Annunciation |
| 3. On the third day he rose again from the dead | c. Good Friday |
| 4. He ascended into heaven | d. All Saints Day |
| 5. Born of the Virgin Mary | e. Ascension Day |
| 6. Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit | f. Christmas Day |

Fill in the blanks

1. The Holy Spirit enlightens our _____, stirs our _____, and strengthens our _____.
2. The “four marks” of the Church are _____, _____, _____, and _____.
3. The Church exists in three “states” -- _____, _____, and _____.

True or False

In Christian Belief:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. God created the world “out of nothing.” | T | F |
| 2. When we die and go to heaven, we become angels. | T | F |
| 3. Jesus was conceived normally by a human mother and father. | T | F |
| 4. Jesus rose on the third day after his death and burial. | T | F |
| 5. To be “Catholic” you have to be Roman Catholic. | T | F |
| 6. Christians are not perfect (yet), just forgiven. | T | F |
| 7. The Church is only the building where we meet for worship. | T | F |