

Best in Lighting

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Hymn: "O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth" (LSB 834)

It was Jean Rosenthal for *Richard III*. It was Jean Rosenthal for *Caesar and Cleopatra*, for *Showboat*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *West Side Story*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Odd Couple*, *Hello, Dolly!* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Who's Jean Rosenthal? That's a good question. Despite the popularity of all these Broadway classics, my bet is Jean Rosenthal is a name that few, if any, have heard before.

And yet Jean Rosenthal has been described as one of the pioneers of theatrical lighting design. Were it not for Jean Rosenthal, you would only hear *The Sound of Music* but would never see Maria and the von Trapp children make the hills come alive with it. Were it not for Jean Rosenthal, you would never see the choreographed street fights of *West Side Story*. Were it not for Jean Rosenthal, you might hear Felix Unger snap at Oscar Madison but would see this *Odd Couple*. You wouldn't see any of it because the stage would be dark were it not for Jean Rosenthal.

If there is one day in the entire church year that highlights the person and work of God the Holy Spirit, this is it, the Day of Pentecost—fifty days after Easter, in the wake of the monumental events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and the Lord's Ascension, this day known as the "Coming of the Holy Spirit. You'd think this would be the day on which the spotlights are redirected to cast our attention to this person of the Trinity, a member that seems to have kept out of the limelight, making visible appearances only on rare occasions. Today should be His day!

But as we consider the events of Pentecost and the entire account from Acts 2—you heard half of it today—it seems that the Holy Spirit says very little for such a big day. It's Peter, in fact, isn't it? It's really Peter, in fact, who does most of the talking and he's not talking about the Holy Spirit either. In fact, while what we heard today was basically his reading of the sermon text, recounting the prophet Joel and his prophecy of this pouring out of the Holy Spirit, it's interesting to note that in the rest of Peter's sermon, in the twenty verses that follow, no less than 16 times in 10 sentences, Peter mentions either explicitly or by reference Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit? Only once. And then He's not even the subject of the verb.

Does it sound at all odd to you? Does it seem to you like the Holy Spirit is not receiving HIs due on the Day of Pentecost. As if He's being given short shrift on this day we call "The Coming of the Holy Spirit."

But it's not at all odd. In fact, the Holy Spirit would have it no other way. The Holy Spirit has been called by one theologian¹ the Shy Member of the Trinity. Certainly not because He's bashful. But the "Shy Member" helpfully indicates where the Holy Spirit prefers to work. Not out front. But behind the scenes. It's His intention not to be the focus of our attention but rather to focus our attention precisely where it needs to be. On Christ. And on Him crucified for us.

And I think the theatrical lighting of Jean Rosenthal helps us understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Like her lights and her lighting that illumined the stage and directs one's attention to the main characters, so the Holy Spirit points our eyes and our ears to that sacred stage on which the life and the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, MN, 1984).

Christ played out. He is the main character. And His work of salvation is the plot of all time.

Imagine this. Imagine if you were to redirect your gaze into that spotlight, what would that do for you? Any good? No good at all. A spotlight is not for looking into. A spotlight is for shedding light upon. Its purpose is to illuminate the object to which it directs your attention. So it is with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit casts the bright beams of His light on that which would otherwise be completely in the dark.

And make no mistake: We are by nature and by birth in the dark when it comes to understanding the things of God and the things of our salvation. St. Paul writes (and by the Holy Spirit), “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God... and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). You see, your most earnest self-reflection, your most ardent introspection, your most mind-numbing meditation can’t begin to enlighten your naturally sinful mind. St. Paul says elsewhere about us naturally born sinners: “Their understanding is darkened...because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18, KJV). This is the core of the Holy Spirit’s work: our spiritual blindness and our recurring propensity toward it.

Because we also can’t pretend that, now having been baptized, our spiritual blindness has nothing more to do with us. Our adversary would persuade us that we can see just fine the way now, that we really don’t need the Holy Spirit’s continued assistance in making plain the things of Scripture. But being blind by nature and, even as Christians, always inclining back toward that old sinful nature that still clings to us, we need the Holy Spirit *continually* to shed light on that which needs to be seen.

Pentecost. In the prominence of Christ Crucified and resurrected and Peter's preaching, the events of Pentecost fulfilled the promise that Christ Jesus made some fifty days before. In the upper room, He said to them, "I will send [the Helper] to you... 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...He will glorify me." Christ Crucified. It's what Peter preached on Pentecost. Just as Jesus said, [The Spirit] will take of what is mine and He'll declare it to you" (Jn 16:7, 13-15).

And that's why the Holy Spirit is not in the limelight. He *is* the limelight. The limelight that casts our attention on Christ and makes us able to see and to know Him for who He is. This is why John concludes His account of the Gospel with these words given Him by the Holy Spirit: "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31).

Dr. Luther, even without using the word light really captures the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in pointing to the work of Jesus Christ, when he says, "This is the office and the work of the Holy Spirit—to reveal through the Gospel what great and glorious things God has done for us in Christ, namely, that He has redeemed us from sin and death, from the devil's power, He has taken us into His grace and protection and has given Himself utterly and entirely for us."

The Holy Spirit did not take on human flesh and lowly posture for you. Christ Jesus did. The Holy Spirit didn't assume into Himself all of those sins of yours, the one you'd so like to forget, the ones that you did forget, the ones that you think you will never forget. Christ Jesus took all of them on Himself. The Holy Spirit did not offer up

His own body and soul on the Cross for you. Christ Jesus did. The Holy Spirit is not the one who rose from the dead and thereby established for you every reason for hope, not just in this life but in the life to come. It wasn't the Holy Spirit, but you know who it was who did. From the Father and by the Spirit it was Jesus Christ who was sent to do it and did it. That's precisely what the Holy Spirit makes known to us and brings to light.

Johann Gerhard said, "Jesus' suffering and death would avail nothing if it were not made known to the world. For there is no advantage in a hidden treasure." Behind the scenes in making it known, that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

It's where He still works. Maybe you hadn't even noticed it. But think about it. Do you believe, as the Scripture says, that Jesus is the Christ come for you to die on your behalf? Because if you do, know for certain that the Holy Spirit has been at work on you. "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

And the Spirit never comes bare, unclothed. The Spirit comes clothed, wearing the Gospel and the gifts of the Sacraments. If to you the Holy Spirit has seemed elusive, this is also certain: He won't be carried on gusts of wind or confirmed by flames of fire. To you He won't be couched in streams and surges of emotion. Expect no dove descents from Him. John the Baptist had a dove sighting. It was pre-arranged by God. The Father told him, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending as a dove," it's your job to point Him out to the world. For John the dove sighting was fine.

At Ascension Mount, the disciples were told that they would be clothed with power from on high. And it happened as it was told them.

But for you and for me, the Holy Spirit has bound Himself to these things: His Word and His sacraments. And so expect Him there. He loves you too much to make

you look for Him. He's told you where He will be found. And that's a comfort to us. Because when the mountains of life give way, here in His Word and His sacraments will He be. When your day is all turned upside-down by circumstances beyond your control, here will He be. When you've turned your life upside-down by what you've done, by what you've left undone, still right here with all the fullness of Christ's forgiving embrace, will He be. Right here and always is where you encounter God the Holy Spirit, who brings these gifts to you, who fixes your eyes and hearts on the Father's only Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you'd like to see a mini-Pentecost every Sunday. The fact is you do. It wasn't the wind or the fire that changed people's hearts at the first Pentecost. Those things just piqued people's curiosity. It was the preaching—Peter and the others preaching Christ. That's what had the heart-changing, faith-creating, faith-sustaining, Spirit-worked effect on 3,000 individual souls that day. The same Spirit works the same effect, through the same predictable things, here in individual souls today. The Lord, the Holy Spirit, continues to do what He began to do that day of Pentecost.

So look around and listen. Christ pours out the Spirit in what you now hear and see. The Holy Spirit, busy behind the scenes. That's how He works. That's where He works. And for you and me that's why He works. A blessed Pentecost to all of you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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