

The Promise is to You, to Your Children, and to All

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER [a]

April 30, 2017

ACTS 2:14a, 36-41

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ³⁶ “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” ³⁷ 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?” ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

We get to see the building up of the Church.

Jesus has already been crucified—he took upon himself all sin and shame and put it to death in his Body on the cross. He has already been raised up from the dead—he broke the hold of death and the demons on his people by walking out of the tomb alive. He has then ascended to Heaven to sit upon the eternal Throne. And now his Apostles are building up the Church.

They are only doing what he set them to do. Before he ascended, he appointed them to make disciples not just in Jerusalem, but in all nations. He told them how to do that: Do the job of making disciples by baptizing sinners into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them my Gospel, teaching them my salvation, teaching them, said Jesus, all the things I have authorized you to teach.

So that's what they are doing. They are teaching sinners the doctrine of Christ; they are gathering them into eternal life by baptizing them into his Name; they are building up the Church.

We get to see how the Lord builds up his Church. Actually, this is not the first time we get to see the building of the Church; this is not the beginning of the Church.

If we want to find the beginning of the Church, if we want to see the first time the Lord is gathering Christians together as Church, we go back to God walking into the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve had made themselves sinners. He walks into the Garden, and hearing his voice, they hid themselves in the trees of the Garden, so that, in their fear, they wouldn't have to look at the Lord's face.

He called to Adam. And he gathered Adam and Eve to himself. The Lord gave them the promise that he would deliver them from their sin, from the tyranny of the devil, and from death. He would bring them into the promise of his Name and the gift of eternal life.

From Eve's lineage, the Lord said, he would bring forth the One who would be struck by Satan, but who would strike Satan's head.

That's the promise to Adam and Eve of the Christ, the promise of the forgiveness of their sins. It's the Gospel to Adam and Eve. And when sinners are gathered to the proclamation of the Gospel, that's the Church.

So the Lord establishes his Church in the Garden; he continues it with giving the covenant promise to Noah and his family; he sustains it with calling the Israelites back from rebellion and gathering them again and again to his Gospel, and now, as Jesus is ascended to Heaven, we get to see the Lord build-up his Church by sending out the Apostles to gather sinners to his Name. They will be baptizing sinners and teaching them of all his works of salvation, of his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascension to the Throne.

In the Catechism, we are given the question, *What is the holy Christian Church?* The answer: *The holy Christian church is the communion of saints, the total number of those who believe in Christ ...*

Then it asks the question, *Where is the holy Christian Church to be found?* The answer: *The holy Christian church is to be found where “the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered.” The Gospel and the Sacraments are called the “marks of the church.”*

For Adam and Eve, they heard the Gospel directly from the mouth of the Lord.

Now in the book of Acts we see the Lord building up his Church by delivering the Gospel through the mouth of Peter and the other Apostles. Peter says to those in Jerusalem,

²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—²³ Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it ... ³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

[Acts 2:36]

Can we hear in this the sting of the Law? This is the Law to those to whom Peter was speaking in Jerusalem, but it is also the Law to us in our lives now: *You have crucified Christ. By your sin, by your rebellion, by your efforts to justify yourself, you are guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus, whom God made both Lord and Christ.*

And those hearing the accusation spoken by Peter react. Acts 2:37:

³⁷ 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 this is where we see the Lord building-up his Church. 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. ³⁹ 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.”

That’s how the Lord builds his Church. It’s the gift of repentance.

Repentance is not something the sinner does; it's not a matter of turning your life around and making yourself clean; it's not the sinner somehow making himself holy. Repentance is a gift bestowed by the Lord. It is grace. It is the Lord, first, convicting you of being a sinner with the accusation of the Law. And then, when you in fear are trying to hide from the face of God—as Adam and Eve hid themselves in the trees, or as you desperately look for an out—as with the men of Jerusalem pleading to Peter, "*What then shall we do?*", repentance is then the second part. It is the Lord coming to you kindly, with mercy, and saying, *I forgive you your sins*. The gift of repentance is the Lord speaking to you first in his Law, and second in his grace, his Gospel.

Be baptized, says Peter, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is the Lord building his Church.

Be baptized, says Peter. It's a passive verb. It is something done to you.

There is the one doing the act, and there is the one being acted upon. In Baptism, you are the one being acted upon, it is done to you, and the one doing it is the Lord. The Name you are baptized into is the Name given by the Lord—the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So being baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ is not a different Baptism, it is the one he mandated to the Apostles, and he gives it to you.

This is the Lord building-up his Church. He's baptizing sinners into his Name, making them his own. And it is all by grace.

This promise, this gift of Baptism, this being brought into the Church and made a member of Jesus Christ, this promise, says Peter, *is to you and your children, and to all who far off.*

That's the way it is with the Lord. There is no holding back on his gifts, there is no sinner to be left out. Because Baptism is the Lord's work, his gift, it is to be withheld from none. It goes to the adults, to the children, to the infants, for this Lord wants none left out of the gift of his Name.

That it goes to those hearing Peter and to their children and infants, and that Peter then says, *and to all those who are far off*—that it goes out of Jerusalem to also the ends of the world and to all languages, is for this gift of the Gospel, this promise of Baptism, to also include you and me.

For we are those who, in Peter's words, are far off. We who come from families maybe originally in northern Europe, or originally in Western Europe and Spain, or from regions of the continent of Africa or from the far East—we are those who come from families far off. And the Lord would no sooner leave us out of his gift of Baptism than he would leave out an infant child of Jerusalem.

The Lord includes us in this promise, this is his grace, his kindness for toward every sinner, it his way of building-up his Church.

Acts 2:40:

Peter said, "Let yourselves be saved from this crooked generation."

In the translation we have before us from our bulletin, it says, "*Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*"

But in the Greek, it's not an active verb. It is not something you do. It is a passive verb, it is something done to you—and the one doing it is the Lord. Acts 2:40:

Peter bore witness and was comforting them, saying, "Be saved from this crooked generation."

It is the Lord all the way through.

It is him convicting you of being a sinner, accusing you with his Law.

It is him forgiving your sin and granting you the gift of repentance.

It is him baptizing you and your children, leaving no one out.

It is him saving you from this crooked generation of our own sin and our own arrogance, by calling and gathering you to his Name by the Gospel.

It is him building-up his Church.

And we get to see it.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.