

The Day of Pentecost

May 24, 2026

Text: John 7:37-39 (Gospel)

Other Texts: Numbers 11:24-30 (Old Testament); Acts 2:1-21 (Second Reading)

### **“The Living Waters of the Holy Spirit”**

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

Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.<sup>1</sup>

These words of Jesus, spoken during His ministry, were words of prophecy. But the fulfillment was not far off. For about five months later Jesus would be crucified, rise from the dead, and, forty days later, enter the fullness of His glory with His ascension to heaven and being seated at the right hand of the Father. And then, ten days after ascending, fifty days after His resurrection, occurred the event He prophesied. For on that fiftieth day, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent forth by the Father and the Son in overflowing abundance upon the Church.

When considering the first New Testament Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, one cannot help but be amazed at the miracles: the sound like the rushing wind filling the house where the disciples were gathered, the tongues of fire resting on them, and their fluent speaking in tongues that they did not previously know.<sup>2</sup> But as astonishing and important as these were, they were not, themselves, the true realization of the prophecy but were instead signs that the fulfillment was happening. For Jesus did not speak of the Holy Spirit in terms of externals—sounds of wind, tongues of fire, or speaking in tongues—but as something internal.

“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Water is not merely outside of us in rivers, lakes, and oceans. It is inside of us, with roughly 60% of the human body being composed of water, with some organs like the brain and lungs being around 80%. No wonder dehydration is so disastrous! No wonder, barring miraculous preservation, a person begins to weaken mentally and physically rather quickly without adequate water intake. And death is not too far away.

As water is *necessary* for life, no wonder then Jesus uses water as a picture of the Holy Spirit: His presence and the new spiritual life He gives, and the many gifts, graces, and comforts His presence brings to those who have been brought to life by His indwelling presence. All received by the person who has faith in Jesus. “Whoever believes in me” will have this living water. But whoever does not believe in Jesus is a waterless land, parched, desiccated. While having physical life, they are spiritually dry, dead like those bones in Ezekiel’s vision.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:37-39. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:2-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-2.

But take note that Jesus doesn't say that if you believe in Him "you'll get a bit of water" in you—a little sprinkling, a small trickle. No. He promises that "rivers of living water" will be flowing from your heart. The Father of all grace gives the Holy Spirit *in abundance* to all who believe in His Son Jesus as their Lord and Savior from their sins.

But more, the water is *living*. When used of actual physical water, this meant that it is not stagnant, but *moving* water (hence *rivers* of living water, not ponds or lakes!). And so it is with the Holy Spirit. He is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, "the Lord and giver of life." Even physical breath is a gift of the Spirit, the breath of God. But a far greater gift, the one that lasts eternally, is the breath of the Spirit in a person's soul, when His presence brings forth living waters within a person. Faith in Jesus. Love for God and for others. Hope in this life because we have hope for eternal life in the world to come.

Truly the Holy Spirit, like living waters, is moving mightily within us. He is the One who first draws us to Jesus so that, by believing in Jesus, the Spirit may then fill us. He began flowing within us when we were born from above in the Spirit-filled waters of Baptism. His flowing presence is like a gentle stream which keeps watering the tender plant of faith even as it is a mighty river, which floods over the doubts and fears that would rise up in us, whether they be of God's existence, His love and forgiveness, or His presence, protection, and care for us. And He continues to flow within us and to evermore fill us, nurturing and strengthening our faith, for He fills us with the increasing desire to hear the Word of Christ in worship services and devotions.

Truly the Holy Spirit, like living waters, is moving mightily within us. Sin is many things, one being selfishness, that is, "love" twisted inward. What sin is *not* committed for personal benefit, even if it is nothing more than emotional gain? Truly, many of the most damaging sins begin with the "tiny" desire to improve one's emotional state, to feel "loved" or better about oneself in some way, to be "happy." Such is the dried-up state of unbelievers. But the Spirit-watered soul of the believer, though certainly tempted, refuses to follow such "self-love."

The life we have received in the Spirit is one of movement, of love extending *outwards*. Love to God, expressed in worship, praise, prayer, and a delight in His commandments. Love to others which seeks their good, their benefit, in both body and soul. So the greatest love we can offer is confessing the truth of God's Word before others, witnessing to them of Christ's sacrifice and the forgiveness and salvation that He won. In these the love for God and neighbor powerfully come together, even as we serve them in charity, helping them as we can, praying for them whether we can offer help or not, for who can help them better than the Heavenly Father!

Truly the Holy Spirit, like living waters, is moving mightily within us. But His flowing presence is challenged. The devil would build dams to block His work within us. The wisdom of the sinful world would have us follow seeming other tributaries which appear to offer water and life, but which truly are nothing but a dried up river bed. Our own sinful nature would lead us to find stagnant, filthy, algae covered pools of sludge, that is, sin, whether self-righteousness or flagrant commandment breaking, and think we have found the water of life. But contaminated water only brings illness, poisoned water only brings death. That's why the must Spirit move in another way as well.

It is the way we do not like so much—the way of trials, struggles, afflictions, and testing. At first this seems to make no sense. Why would God permit such things to affect His children, those whom He claims to love so much, for whom His only-begotten Son took on flesh so that He could die that they might live? Is it not in the midst of these that some lose their faith and so also then the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? And yes, that can and does happen. They are the plants that sprout, but then are either choked out by weeds or dry up under the scorching sun. Truly, the devil is always tempting and afflicting us right up to the limit God gives him with the sole purpose of destroying our faith and so devouring us. Yet, more must be said.

Have you heard the saying, “Use it or lose it”? The healthiest thing for muscle is *not* lack of use. A muscle not used atrophies: becoming smaller, weaker and, if the course is not halted and reversed, useless. Now think of faith as a spiritual muscle. Faith must be used, challenged. Even as weight training causes micro-tears in a muscle so that in healing it grows back larger and stronger, similarly the various challenges we face, which “tear” our faith up a bit, are used by God to increase it and make it tougher.

But cannot someone do actual damage to their muscles by over-training? That is true. But the wise lifter knows to train within limits, only slowly extending them. So then how much more does the omniscient Spirit of divine wisdom know what our limits are, how far our faith can be challenged, how much pressure it can hold up under that it is not damaged and bring rest when the time is right. And by His omnipotence and angelic warriors He ensures that we are never tested or tempted beyond them!

Instead of damage, these afflictions and temptations improve our faith. They drive us back to Jesus. Back to His Word. Back to prayer. Prayers for forgiveness where we have sinned and fallen short. Prayers for strength, endurance, patience, and deliverance. Truly these challenges, being so painful, remind us again that our true hope is not simply things improving here, but in the complete restoration of all things at the resurrection on the Last Day.

Isaiah prophesied, “With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation.”<sup>4</sup> In this life our souls thirst, for there is still the dryness of sin within and from walking daily in the spiritual desert that is this world. Yes, we thirst. We thirst for forgiveness, for righteousness, for life with God. And we find our thirst quenched in Christ Jesus alone, His life, death, and resurrection. We come to Him in the Word and Sacraments. And we find Him, the springs of salvation. He fills our inner being with the living waters, the Holy Spirit, who brings to us all the blessings that Jesus won for us. Blessings of faith, forgiveness, comfort, hope, peace, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Blessings for this life now, but also a life that lasts forever.

Dear Christians, the Holy Spirit is the life-giving water of God. Through faith in Jesus He continues to flow in you with all His blessings, and through you to bring blessings to others. May He flow mightily within us! Amen!

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 12:3.