

Two-Sided Miracle

Two sides of the same coin. We say this when two things go together. We use this term especially when the two things may seem unrelated to each other, but they are not. They cannot and should not be separated from each other; like Good Friday and Easter Sunday. ***They are two sides of the same salvation coin.*** Let's talk about the "Pentecost Coin." Every Christian knows about the miracle of Pentecost; the miracle of the disciples suddenly—by the working of the Holy Spirit—being able to speak ***foreign languages***. And let's be clear: These guys weren't speaking gibberish or just making up sounds and words that nobody ever heard before. No! They were given "power from on high" to actually and fluently speak the languages of the foreigners in their midst.

But that's only one side of the Pentecost Coin! So often we forget about the other side of the coin. We forget about the ***miracle of understanding*** what these gentes were saying. **Speaking and understanding necessarily go together.** They are two sides of the same coin. One without the other just doesn't work. Anyone with teenagers (or with a spouse who has "selective hearing") can tell you that speaking without someone properly hearing/understanding just doesn't work. Of course, there's also the flip-side. If someone isn't speaking clearly; if someone isn't explaining things clearly, you won't be able to properly understand. Speaking and understanding: Two sides of the same miraculous Pentecost Coin.

Now, it may seem odd to say that all those foreigners being able to understand the Gospel being proclaimed in ***their own native tongue*** is some sort of miracle. It's like marveling at the fact that you speak Spanish and everyone from Mexico can understand what you're saying. ***That's not exactly miraculous, is it?*** That's not what I mean when I speak of the miracle of understanding. Remember: These guys were now—by the power of the Holy Spirit on high—***boldly proclaiming the Truth of sin and salvation.*** You can hear it in St. Peter's exhortation to the crowd. ***"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.'*** (Act 2:36-39)

Did you catch all that? The people **understood** what Peter was saying about the deadly wage of sin—their sin. They understood that when he said that they crucified Jesus, he wasn't simply saying that they were the ones who gave false testimony at His sham trial or shouted for his crucifixion on Good Friday. No.

They understood that it was their sin that put Jesus on that cross. They also understood that their sin separated them from God, and that they were miserable sinners who needed saving. ***“What shall we do?”*** Peter’s response: Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all your sin. ***They understood.*** They obviously understood because over 3,000 of them were baptized that very morning in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all their sin; for the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. Side-note: They also understood the fact that this baptismal promise of forgiveness and peace was intended for **everyone**; i.e., even the littlest of children and the greatest of sinners. No one was too sinful or too far gone for baptism and forgiveness. Infant baptism was never an issue until after the Reformation, some 1500 years later, when a couple of fools thought they understood better than God and His clear proclamation forgiveness and peace.

That brings us to today. Let’s talk for a minute about proper understanding. Your Lord Christ Himself says very clearly: ***“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word.... Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words.”*** You know what your Lord says about the reality of your sins, right? ***We’re all familiar with the Ten Commandments.*** Most of us grew up having to memorize them. We had to recite them verbatim on command. We know what God says. We all know what He says about having other gods and despising the Sabbath and murdering and adultery and lying and coveting. We know it all. ***But... do we understand? Do we understand as well as we think we do?*** You may not want to admit it, but there are plenty of times in our daily lives that the fruits we bear—our words and deeds—***show that we really don’t understand.*** There are plenty of times that our “bold confession of faith” is separated from our fruits of faith. **This cannot be!** Confession of faith and fruits of faith go together, like two sides of the same coin. It’s almost like God is speaking a strange foreign language to us. It’s all gibberish that doesn’t seem to apply to us.

Pay careful attention to what your Lord says: We love God by keeping His Word. That means that we show that we understand what God says about the Truth of our sin and the Truth of our salvation ***by keeping His Word.*** We show our love to God for all that He has so graciously done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus ***by keeping His Word.*** Our words and our actions—***together***—show that we understand what God says about the reality of our sin and the reality of our salvation. Can we truly love God and yet continue to ***willfully*** sin against Him? Can we truly love God and yet ***willfully*** say and do anti-Christian things? Can we love Jesus, and yet despise His good gifts—Word and Sacrament? Can we love Jesus, and yet not want to be with Him where He is? ***“I love Jesus, but I love sleeping in.”*** Yeah... that’s a problem. ***“Whoever does not love Me does not keep My Word.”*** That’s pretty cut-and-dry. ***The fools will take offense and try to justify themselves, but the ones who are wise in repentant faith understand what our Lord is saying here.*** We may say we love Jesus, but our

words and deeds sometimes betray us. If you remember, John the Baptist let the Pharisees have it, calling them whitewashed tombs and fraudulent vipers because they were only putting on a show. They were saying the right things. They were going through all the motions, but their hearts were far from true repentance.

“Bear fruits that are in keeping with true repentance.” Your Lord Himself took issue with Old Testament Israel many times for the same behavior. *“They worship Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.”* So it can be with us too. Our words and deeds sometimes reveal the ugly Truth that we really don’t understand what this [*the crucifix*] means.

But enough about us. Let’s follow good Pentecost protocol and proclaim the Truth of Christ. ***This Jesus, whom you crucified with your sins, died and rose again for you.*** He took on flesh and suffered the Father’s just and righteous hellish wrath against sin in your place, all so that you never have to experience a single second of it for yourself. Why? Because there’s **NOTHING** you can do to save yourself! There’s **NOTHING** you can do to make things right with God. This [*crucifix*] is how much God loves you! God doesn’t love you because you make the first move and decide to keep His Word/Commands, as if God now scratches your back only because you first scratched His. **No! God makes the first move.** God loved you while you were still dead in your sin. He loved you so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for you. God doesn’t love us ***because*** we keep His Word, as if His love is contingent upon our works. He loved us first. We respond to His love for us by endeavoring to keep His Word. ***And make no mistake: Love of God doesn’t make excuses for our sins.*** That’s not love of God at all! That’s nothing more than love of the sin. Love of God truly desires to keep His Word; to repent of the sin, and forgiven of that sin to now “go and sin no more.” As I always say, we endeavor to keep His Word, not in order to be saved, but out of the joy and thanksgiving that we are saved.

And that’s the point. **You are saved.** Christ Jesus died and rose again for you; for the forgiveness of all your sins. By God’s grace, you have been baptized into His royal household. God has put His name on you and made you His own. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against this. Look to this altar. Here is this same almighty God and Lord, kneeling down from heaven to be in your very midst, ***not to threaten you and brow-beat and shame you into submission,*** but to draw you near to Him in love so that He can nourish you with His own Body and Blood; the blood-bought gifts of victory over sin, death, and the devil. Here is the Lord of Life Himself, in the very midst of this shadowy valley of death, giving you His gifts of mercy, grace, and forgiveness of sins.

Look around: By God’s grace—through the working of the Holy Spirit on high—***the miracle of Pentecost is still happening today, and it’s happening to you.*** How can I say such a thing? Easy. **You understand all this.** By grace, through faith, you understand what all this [*crucifix, Word/Sacrament*] means. In a

very *wonderfully ironic kind of way*, you understand, and by understanding and believing you have a peace that surpasses all understanding.

I guess the only question that remains (and it's a question very fitting for Pentecost): *How can you not want to share this Good News with everyone else?* That's how true evangelism and mission take place, right? Evangelism and mission is what takes place when you understand all this. *You understand all this, and you want everyone else to understand too.* We know the Truth, and we want everyone else to know and understand and have this Truth; *this peace, which surpasses all understanding; the peace that is known only in Christ the Lord.*

May God grant you this same peace and understanding (see how they go together, like two sides of the same coin?), and may all your words and deeds from this time forth and into all eternity *go together* and be faithful proclamations (not contradictions) of your love for Christ and all that He has so graciously done for you and for all the children of Adam in His all-redeeming life, death, and resurrection.

In His name and to His glory... **AMEN.**