

## Pentecost Sunday

“Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #497)

Lutheran Christians do not often address their prayers to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. One need only browse the dozens of “Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings” found in the front matter of the *Lutheran Service Book* (pp. 305-318), where many prayers are addressed specifically to God the Father, a handful to Christ, and none to the Holy Spirit. It is then, with a fresh breath, that we come to the festival of Pentecost and its related hymnody, where nearly all we sing is formed as prayer to the Spirit, including the hymn of the day, Luther’s “Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott.”

And for what do we pray? Let’s look!

In stanza 1, we pray for an outpouring of the Spirit’s graces, love, and light, for unity in the Church, and that ubiquitous praises be sung to God (“Alleluia”).

Truly, we should pray for grace, for without it we cannot pray at all, as Luther reminds us in his explanation of the third article of the Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

In stanza 2, we pray that the Word of life would shine, teaching us to know God as our Father, that we be kept from error and serve Christ alone, and that in faith we confide in Christ, that is trust in Him, confess our sins to Him, and—indeed—pray to Him.

Truly, we should pray for the Word of life, for Luther continues in his explanation of the third article that “In the same way [the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.”

In stanza 3 of our hymn, we pray that the evidence of faith be visible in our lives just as the holy Fire was visible on the heads of the disciples that first Christian Pentecost. We pray that the Spirit would move us to do God’s will, abide in service, and face trials with faith, strengthened by the Lord’s power throughout life, that we might pass through death and ascend to eternal life with God.

Truly, we should pray in this way, for as Luther reminds us in his conclusion to the third article explanation: “On the Last Day He [yes, the Holy Spirit] will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.”

Holy Spirit, bless our lives, this day and always, with grace, faith, and good works unto the end. Amen.

[Quotations are from Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, © 1986, 1991 Concordia Publishing House. Used by permission. [www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org)]

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Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, with all Your graces now outpoured  
on each believer's mind and heart;  
Your fervent love to them impart.  
Lord, by the brightness of Your light  
in holy faith Your Church unite;  
From every land and every tongue this to Your praise, O Lord, our God, be sung:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, holy Light, guide divine, now cause the Word of life to shine.  
Teach us to know our God aright  
and call Him Father with delight.  
From every error keep us free;  
Let none but Christ our master be  
that we in living faith abide,  
in Him, our Lord, with all our might confide.  
Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, holy Fire, comfort true, grant us the will Your work to do  
and in Your service to abide;  
let trials turn us not aside.  
Lord, by Your power prepare each heart,  
and to our weakness strength impart  
that bravely here we may contend,  
through life and death to You, our Lord, ascend.  
Alleluia, alleluia!

St. 1: German antiphon, 15<sup>th</sup> century, based on the earlier Latin antiphon for the Vigil of Pentecost.

Sts. 2 & 3: Martin Luther, 1483-1546, translation *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941, altered. Copyright © Concordia Publishing House. Used by permission.

In his *Table Talk*, Luther later expressed his fondness for this hymn, saying it "was composed by the Holy Ghost himself, both words and music."

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music, Concordia University Chicago. It may be downloaded and printed for local use.]