

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We didn't get to celebrate the Easter Feast, but the season is not over. We continue to ponder Jesus' resurrection. But this far into season we have moved beyond Jesus' resurrection appearances to the Church's proclamation of that resurrection.

In our first reading, we find Paul in Athens, the city with those beautiful structures dedicated to their mythical gods and goddesses. The most famous structure is probably the Parthenon, dedicated to Athen's patron goddess Athena. Paul's "*spirit was provoked within him*" by this "*city ... full of idols.*" He began to reason with the Jews and others in the synagogue and in the marketplace, with anyone who would listen. Paul preached "*Jesus and the resurrection.*"

He caught their interest. Even "*the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers*" wanted to hear more. They took Paul to the Areopagus. Perhaps that means to the rock hill where supposedly Ares, the Greek god of war, had "been tried ... by the gods for the murder of Poseidon's son." Blah, blah, blah. It's sometimes referred to as "Mars Hill" because the Roman god of war was Mars. But more probably this means that Paul was brought before the Council of the Areopagus because of its "special jurisdiction in matters of morals and religion" (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1:108).

Regardless, Paul presented his case for the true God, not idols made of "*gold or silver or stone.*" He made His case for the Creator and Preserver of all things, not something imagined by the mind of man and fashioned by his hands. He made his case for the God who would one day judge the world through His Son, whom He raised from the dead. He made his case for the God who "*is actually not far from each one of us.*"

Some mocked Paul's preaching, but some wanted to hear more, and some believed and became disciples, prominent among them was "*Dionysius the Areopagite,*" that is, one of the Council members. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, the preaching of Christ, who is not far away but comes to us even now, moved this Gentile to believe in Jesus.

Peter similarly preached Jesus' cross and resurrection: "*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*" And although Jesus is raised and "*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers,*" yet He is with us, saving us by the water connected up to His resurrection—"Baptism ... now saves you"—and by the preaching of His cross and resurrection, and by the Holy Supper of His own body broken on a cross and His

life-giving blood shed there. That's how Jesus could say as He prepared to ascend to the Father, "*behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20).

This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples as He was preparing them for His death and resurrection and departure to the Father. Not only would He come again one day to take them to their heavenly mansion, but also that He would come to them through the work of another Helper whom He would send. Jesus says, I have been your Helper and Friend, your Savior and Redeemer, but He says, as I depart, I will send you another Helper, the Spirit of truth. And I will come to you through His work and will manifest myself to you through His work. For although we know that in Christ is life (Jn 1:4), and He declares that He is the Life (Jn 14:6) and that His words are spirit and life, we know also the Spirit is the giver of life (Jn. 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). He takes what belongs to Jesus and declares it to us (John 16:15).

This is really the work of the Spirit: after Jesus' ascension into heaven to make Him present for us even now. And so the Spirit does it. Carried to us by word and water, the Spirit dwells within us, and by Him, we come to believe that Jesus is our Lord and God and in this believing we are given life (John 20:28, 31)—indeed, apart from the Spirit, we cannot believe; we cannot call Jesus Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). By this same word and Sacraments, the Spirit allows us to see Jesus who comes to us in these holy things. The world can't see Him, because they don't have the Spirit, but the Spirit has come to us. And so Jesus is made manifest to us in these, and we confess truly that "Christ has triumphed; He is living"; and we believe that because He lives, we also will live.

Of course, especially, we know and confess that Jesus is with us in the Supper He has given His Church to eat. As He promised, having ascended to the Father's right hand in His kingdom, he drinks anew with us "*this fruit of the vine*" become His "*blood of the New Testament*" "*poured out*" for our forgiveness (Matt. 26:28-29). And the Spirit, who brings to our remembrance Jesus' instituting words, effects Jesus' presence among us, so that we eat the very body and drink the very blood of the resurrected Christ for our life.

This is the work of the Helper whom Christ sends from the Father. This is the Spirit's work: to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. This is the work of the Lord and Giver of life: to bear witness to Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead, who is with us even now. Empowered by the Spirit, the Church's Easter proclamation goes on and will go on till Christ comes again. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.