

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, June 11, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Sundays after Pentecost”

READING: Acts 2:42-47 – They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Last Sunday we entered into the season that we generally refer to as “The Sundays after Pentecost”. Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost are behind us. The paraments are now green and will probably stay green until sometime in November save for Reformation Sunday. This season used to be called “Trinity Season” back when our hymnal was TLH (the old red one). The “Festival” portion of the church year is over. We’re now in the “Non-festival” portion of the year. The emphasis for the next six months is teaching and learning. We’ll hear Jesus’ parables, sail with St. Paul on his missionary journeys, and be taught by Jesus and the apostles the essentials of the Kingdom. Sometimes we even learn a little about the Church and its traditions.

For instance, have you ever wondered what the story is with the candles in the chancel? The acolytes are always very concerned that they are lighting the right ones and in the right order. It’s sort of funny because the Scriptures say nothing about these candles. We just have some traditions that we try to observe but there’s no command from the Lord about how many we light or in what order.

Let’s start with the Christ Candle. That’s the stubby one the altar with the red “Chi-Ro” on it. The Chi-Ro looks like a capital “P” with an “X” over it. Those are actually the first two letters in the Greek word “Xristos” or Christ. As you might guess that candle represents the presence of Jesus at our worship. That candle ALWAYS gets lit first and put out last because Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.” During the Advent season the Christ Candle sits in the middle of the Advent Wreath, but it does not get lit until the Christmas Eve service, announcing that the Christ has come to us. During Advent we light one blue candle on the First Sunday of Advent, two on the Second Sunday, and so on. Then the Christ Candle holds its place the rest of the year.

Next let’s talk about the “Paschal Candle” or the baptismal candle (or as the kids call it, “The Tall One”). During the seasons of Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter the Paschal Candle is lit for every service. During Advent, Lent, and the Sundays after Pentecost the Paschal Candle is lit ONLY if there is a baptism taking place that particular weekend in any of the three services. So if during the summer and early fall you see the acolyte light the Paschal Candle, you know right away someone has been or will be baptized in one or more of the services.

The two Altar Candles are lit for every service with the possible exceptions of the Ash Wednesday service and/or Good Friday. Sometimes we don’t light them on those two days because they are so penitential, so somber, and so dark. Otherwise those two candles always signify the presence of the Almighty and our prayers ascending to his throne of grace. If we really want to light up the place, say for Christmas Eve or Easter, we’ll replace (or even add to) the single Altar Candles and bring in the Candelabra! Those are the stands that have seven candles each. They are modeled after the candelabras that were placed in the Lord’s tabernacle and later in the Temple.

It's always a little comical to me that before pretty much every service the elder on duty will at some point ask Pastor Woods or myself, "How many candles do we light tonight or today?" They in turn tell the acolytes how many to light. Once in a great while, the signals get garbled and the Paschal Candle is burning when it's not supposed to be, or it's not burning when it should be. Someone's usually embarrassed once they realize their mistake. Often none of us realize it. That's okay. We do our best to do things in an orderly and meaningful way, but what's most important in any service is God's Word, his Sacraments, and "the peace that passes all understanding." The candles play their part in our services, but their number and order of lighting are small potatoes in the greater scheme of things.

The Early Church developed traditions in their worship gatherings, too. Some they carried over from the Jewish customs. Some developed of their own accord. What was important to them was learning from the apostles, celebrating the Lord's Supper, the fellowship they shared together, and the love they exhibited to each other and the folks around them. Those are still the joys and strengths of our worship. Those are the real gifts. Candles, artwork, stained glass windows, wood carvings, and even pew pads add to our experiences but it will always be the Word of God and the grace he gives us there that will bless us and carry us forward. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) VBS! VBS! VBS! Yes, it's almost here! Sunday, June 23-Wednesday, June 26. Spread the word to any family you know with young children. This is for them! Pastor Woods can use your help if you are able. He'll be there every Tuesday and Wednesday evening until it's here.
- 2) FRANKENMUTH BUS TRIP – September 29-October 2. Registration is now open. Find information and forms in "News & Tidbits", online, and in the Narthex. 53 seats available.