

### ***“O Holy Spirit, Enter In”***

In a recent post, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas wrote about the recent turmoil we’ve seen across our nation. (“Racism, Rioting, and Redemption,” June 2, 2020) Briefly retracing the history of where we’ve been and why we’ve had so little success in trying to resolve these issues, Thomas said, “A changed heart is key, something government lacks the power to achieve.”

He’s right. The government doesn’t have the power to change hearts. Government operates where God has authorized and empowered it to operate: in the realm of the law. Laws can force people to act in certain ways, but passing and enforcing laws does not change hearts. (I’m reminded of the story of a kindergarten student who, after being told by his teacher for the twentieth time to sit down did so, but said, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside!”)

The power to change hearts is not going to be found in the law. There is no magic piece of legislation that will turn around the hearts and minds and attitudes of people and make us all better and more loving toward one another. That power is found only in the Gospel.

While the law (of God and of man) shows us our sin and seeks to turn us away from sinful behavior, it is the Gospel that shows us our Savior, Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that forgives our sins reshapes our hearts and lives, our words and deeds, as the power of the Holy Spirit goes to work in us.

*“O Holy Spirit, enter in, And in our hearts Your work begin, Your dwelling place now make us. Sun of the soul, O Light divine, Around and in us brightly shine, To joy and gladness wake us That we may be Truly living, To You giving Prayer unceasing And in love be still increasing.”*

That hymn, first written for Pentecost in 1640 near the end of the horrible conflict called the Thirty Years’ War, recalls and gives thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The hymn goes on to locate the Holy Spirit’s work in and through the Word of God:

*“Give to Your Word impressive pow’r, That in our hearts from this good hour As fire it may be glowing, That in true Christian unity We faithful witnesses may be. Your glory ever showing. Hear us, cheer us By Your teaching; Let our preaching And our labor Praise You, Lord, and serve our neighbor.”*

As the Holy Spirit gives power to God’s Word, that Word changes us. We are not only changed into believers, we are changed into “faithful witnesses” who praise and glorify God both by proclaiming His Gospel and by reaching out to our neighbors in need—all of our neighbors—in acts of mercy. Living with such changed hearts and lives, we ask that God’s Word and Holy Spirit remain with us, keeping us “faithful unto death” that we may receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10) that is “our Savior’s blessing”:

*“O mighty Rock, O Source of life, Let Your dear Word, in doubt and strife, In us be strongly burning That we be faithful unto death And live in love and holy faith, From You true wisdom learning. Your grace and peace On us shower; By Your power Christ confessing, Let us see our Savior’s blessing.” (Lutheran Service Book, 913)*

“A changed heart is key.” O Holy Spirit, work in us and through us, changing our hearts and lives that we, through the preaching and living of Your Word, may change the hearts and lives of those suffering around us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.