

Cantate
John 16:5-15

Jesus says, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (vv. 7-11)

Jesus is comforting His disciples before He is betrayed and killed. Even though Jesus has been warning them about what He must do for the salvation of the world, they won't understand what is happening as it is happening. Jesus loves these twelve men, even the one who will betray Him. So, He prepares them for His upcoming trial and tribulation and consequently, their upcoming trial and tribulation. Jesus is going away, but He's not leaving them alone. Jesus is going away, but it's not the end of their work. In fact, it's only the beginning. Jesus will send the Holy Spirit who will comfort them.

The word for the Holy Spirit here is *paraclete*. Helper, as you heard read in the Gospel reading, is one possible translation. *Paraclete* in the strictest sense means a defense lawyer. Jesus, as our *Paraclete* defends us against the charges of the devil. The basic meaning of *paraclete* expanded to mean mediator and comforter and helper. The Holy Spirit acts as a mediator when He intercedes for you when you don't know what to pray as Paul describes in Romans 8. In John 16, we really see the Holy Spirit acting as a comforter.

God wants you also to be comforted by His Holy Spirit. You too face trial and tribulation. To be sure, you are exiles because your home is in the new heavens and the earth. (1 Peter 2:11) And Jesus in His so-named “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17, says you are not *of* the world like He is not *of* the world, but you are still *in* the world. (John 17:11-18)

And while you are in the world, you will have trial and tribulation. But Jesus sends you His Holy Spirit as well to comfort you amidst trials and tribulations. And the Holy Spirit comforts you in the same way He comforted the Apostles.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This is comforting for the apostles and for you. How does this provide comfort?

First, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because they haven't believed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is very specific here. The Holy Spirit convicts the world for a very particular sin: not believing in Jesus. Paul states clearly that all men, apart from Jesus Himself, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23) Even the world can recognize sin. Even with how confused the world is about sexual sin, it still understands that cheating on your partner is wrong. But we need to understand that there is more than just sin in the world. We need to know that we are individual sinners.

Can you imagine having a weird lump on your body and not getting it checked out by the doctor? This actually happens. Fear of what the lump might be freezes some people into inaction. And, in many cases, by the time they can no longer ignore the lump, it's too late to effectively treat it. But if you get it checked out early, there's comfort in knowing what it is, even if it is something horrible like non-benign cancer. There's comfort in the truth. And with truth, it's possible to find a cure.

It's like that with sin. Sin is even uglier than the worst cancer. And most of the time, we don't know the depth of our depravity. The Holy Spirit reveals to us our sin. He convicts the whole world. And it's no fun to be convicted of your sin. It hurts. But with the truth of your sin, comes a cure. Not a possible cure like with cancer, but a 100%, guaranteed cure. We know it's a guaranteed cure because Jesus rose from the dead. His sacrifice for sin paid for the sin of the world.

No one goes to hell because of their sin. To be clear, we are all deserving of hell because of our sin. We rejected our creator and attempt to be our own god. This is deserving of eternal death. But before the foundation of the world, God solved our sin problem. He solved it by assuming our creatureliness into Himself and crucified our sin to the cross. John 3:16 says that “God so loved the *world that He gave His only [begotten] Son.*” It doesn’t say that “God so loved His chosen people that He gave His only begotten Son.” Jesus’ atoning sacrifice paid for the sins you’ve already committed and for all the sin you will commit in the future. And not only your sin, but the sin of the whole world.

Jesus says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) Your salvation depends on believing in Jesus and being baptized. It doesn’t depend on you atoning for your sin, as if you could. No. You are saved by faith alone. And in this is great comfort. When you believe that Jesus atoned for *your* sin, then you have comfort.

Those who are condemned are condemned because of unbelief. But a very specific unbelief. They are condemned because of their unbelief in Jesus. This is why our evangelistic efforts must always focus on the question, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” This is the great confession of Peter, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) And Jesus says that Peter didn’t come to this by himself, but it was revealed to him by God the Father working through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because they don’t believe in Jesus. They are still in their sin. You, dear Christian, are no longer in your sin, but you are freed from your sin because you believe in Jesus as the living Son of God for you.

The Holy Spirit also convicts the world of righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father. Jesus is the perfect picture of righteousness. He did what we could not do: He lived a perfect and righteous life. He laid down His life for His enemies so that they might become His friends. Jesus goes to the right hand of His Father because all the work He did for your forgiveness and righteousness is completed.

No one who ever goes to heaven goes because of their own righteousness. If you depend on your own righteousness, you are doomed just as certainly as the wedding guest who didn't wear the provided wedding garment was in Matthew 22. Even as a believer your own righteousness is tainted by original sin. You must have an alien righteousness, that is, you must have a righteousness that is not your own.

This righteousness is provided to you in your baptism. We call this the blessed exchange. Jesus gets all your sin in your baptism, and you get all His righteousness. This is what Jesus means when He tells John at His baptism, "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) Your righteousness was completed nearly 2,000 years ago! When Jesus ascended to heaven, He stored your righteousness away in heaven where neither rust nor moth can destroy it.

This is why Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-6) That newness of life comes from knowing that your sin is covered, and your righteousness is secure with Jesus in heaven. This is a different picture of Christians than the world has.

The world sees you as "holier than thou" and hypocrites and bigots. The world is convicted by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word of God. We call sin, sin, and righteousness, righteousness, and the world hates us because of that. We are sinners who proclaim what sin is. We do it knowing, like Paul, that we are a chief sinner. Even though we are sinners, we proclaim sin as sin because only when you know you've sinned do you know that you need the cure for sin: forgiveness.

We are sinners who also proclaim what righteousness is. We don't let the world be settled with its own idea of righteousness for that way only leads to death. And the world hates Christians because we are salt and light.

As Jesus says, “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (John 3:20)

You dear Christian, cling to the righteousness of Christ and will receive your reward. This is your comfort: the righteousness of Jesus. He gives it freely to you in your baptism along with salvation. Live as if you already have eternal salvation because you already have it. It is yours in Christ Jesus at your baptism no matter what the devil or the world or even your own flesh say about it.

The Holy Spirit also convicts the world of judgment because the ruler of the world is already judged. The angels had free choice just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The devil rebelled against God and dragged about a third of the angels down with him. (Revelation 12:4) They are now confirmed in their choice. Angels will continue in their righteousness and the demons will continue in their judgment. This is one of the big reasons the devil and demons hate you so much. There’s no chance of redemption for them because they are already judged.

This is a great comfort for us. No matter how much the devil and demons hate you and attack you, they are judged already. The devil already tried to devour Jesus at His birth, but he failed. (Rev 12:4-5) The devil will try to devour you, but what can separate you from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:38-39)

This is why it is so important to attend the Divine Service regularly. Your salvation is a gift, it is not of your own doing. Since you still live in the world that hates you, you need to be constantly reminded that forgiveness of your sins and your right standing before God is found only in Christ. “It is not our own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8) Just as much as you need to nourish your body with food to continue living, you must continue to nourish your body and soul with the gifts of God. And God is not stingy with His gifts. And in these gifts, you receive true, lasting comfort. Comfort that the world doesn’t know and comfort that cannot be taken from you!

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. This gives you comfort because you know your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus, because you know that your righteousness is secure with Jesus at the right hand of the Father, and because you know that the ruler of this world is judged already so there's nothing he can do to steal away your forgiveness or righteousness. With comfort like this, is there any trial or tribulation that can shake you from clinging to Jesus?

Today is *cantate* Sunday which means "to sing." We sing because we have joy that can only come from being comforted by God's Holy Spirit. "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" is a perfect hymn for today's Gospel of comfort. It calls sin, sin and righteousness, righteousness. It clearly depicts who you are apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, you are a doomed sinner and all your good works do nothing for you. But the righteousness of God, Christ, came and saved you from your sin. He had compassion and shed His blood on your behalf. And what Jesus has done cannot be undone! How can we not joyfully sing upon such good news?

So, live as if your sin is forgiven and your righteousness is secure in Christ. Because you are forgiven today. Your righteousness is secure today! Today is the day of salvation. May God be praised continually for His work on your behalf. And on behalf of the entire world.

God be praised! Amen.