

Exaudi
John 15:26—16:4

Jesus says, “When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” (Jn 15:26—16:1)

Jesus teaches us how to hear the Holy Spirit and why you must hear Him.

I hope you noticed that I changed the word from “Helper” to “Comforter” which we’ve talked about this Easter season. The Greek word *paraclete* can mean either helper or comforter and there’s no doubt the Holy Spirit does both, yet comforter so much more matches His personality.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth. God cannot lie. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and therefore, He cannot lie. His witness is true. But what is His witness?

Jesus clearly says here the Holy Spirit will witness about Jesus. And Jesus clearly says the Holy Spirit will bear witness *to the apostles*. When you read the Scriptures, you need to always ask yourself, “Who is Jesus talking to?” It may or may not apply to you!

A great example of something Jesus says that doesn’t apply to you directly are His words to Mary Magdalene in the garden of His empty tomb. He tells her to not cling to Him because He hadn’t yet ascended to His Father in heaven. (Jn 20:17) Mary was trying to cling to Jesus as if He was still doing His earthly ministry. That was an option for Mary because she knew Jesus before and after His resurrection from the dead and before the Ascension of Our Lord. That’s not even an option for us. The only option we have is to cling to Jesus through His Word and Sacraments. But we can learn from Jesus’ words to Mary. If He told Mary, who physically clung to Jesus, that she must now cling to Him through His Word, how much more are we to cling to Jesus through His Word?

And this is the very same Word that the Holy Spirit bore witness to the apostles. And that they will bear witness to the world. That’s why we call it the apostolic faith. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus known through the witness of the apostles. As Peter says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to

you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty... for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Peter 1:16, 21) The Holy Spirit works through the witness of the apostles.

In the technical sense, the Holy Spirit does not witness to you as He did to the apostles. The Holy Spirit confirms the witness of the apostles so that you believe it and consequently believe in Jesus who is your life and salvation. In the technical sense, you are not a witness of Jesus because you weren't there like Peter was. Technically, you are a confessor of the apostolic faith, and the Holy Spirit works faith in hearers when and where He wills. This should encourage all of us to tell people about Jesus and what He has done through the Word of God. And this doesn't mean you have to quote Scripture directly. If you tell someone the parable of the prodigal son in your own words, the Holy Spirit will work through that paraphrase. To be sure, your life should bear witness that you believe what you say, but the content of what you say must be the Word of God. God the Holy Spirit “speaks” when you speak the Word of God. Yet so many seek to hear the Holy Spirit in other places. Places where He has not promised to speak. Let's look at where the Holy Spirit has not promised to speak.

First, the Holy Spirit does not speak through circumstances. If something happens in your life, God isn't trying to tell you something. A great example of this is Saul and David which we are reading about in our Thursday morning Bible study. Saul was Israel's first king. The people of Israel had rejected God as their King and wanted an earthly king like the nations around them. God chose Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul sinned by performing the sacrifice which only Samuel was to do because God had delayed Samuel. Instead of waiting for Samuel as he ought to do, Saul performed the sacrifice and offended God. God rejected Saul from being king and anointed David in his place. Saul knew this because Samuel told him God had rejected him. David knew this because Samuel anointed him in Bethlehem. Yet God didn't hand over the kingdom of Israel to David right away. Saul tried to kill David many times and David fled. We hear in 1 Samuel that David had fled to Keilah and Saul heard about it. David had kind of backed himself into a corner at God's direction from Abiathar. Saul concluded, “God has given [David] into my hand, for He has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.” (23:7) Saul was sure that God was talking through circumstances. And Saul was dead wrong. God used the Philistines to draw Saul away from David and eventually Saul was killed in battle so that David could ascend to the throne.

This highlights that God does work through circumstances, but God doesn't speak through them. We are not to seek God's will, or voice, through circumstances. Job's wife and friends did this and were wrong. On top of that, they provided no comfort to Job as he was suffering. Job certainly didn't understand why he was suffering. God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind and says, basically, "Who are you to question Me?" Job's confession is great: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) This is reminiscent of Jesus words when some asked Him about Pilate mingling some Galilean's blood with his abominable sacrifices. Jesus replied: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them: do you think they were worse offenders than all the other who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:2-5)

Thanks to the Word of God, we know that Job suffered to have his faith tested. But God doesn't reveal to you why you might suffer. You might suffer because of your own sin. You might suffer because of someone else's sin. You might suffer because God is testing your faith. You might suffer so that the experience of your suffering might be an encouragement to someone else suffering the same thing. Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12-13)

So, we know from the Word of God through Job and Jesus that repentance is a proper response to suffering. We also know from the Word of God through Peter that rejoicing is a proper response to suffering. These are not natural responses to suffering. Why would we repent when someone else is suffering? We want to know what they did to "deserve" their suffering. We want to pretend that we don't deserve any suffering even though we know we sin. Furthermore, why would we rejoice when we suffer? The natural response is to be angry at God. Yet, repentance and rejoicing are the Christian's response to suffering. And this is only possible through the gift of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and Sacraments. Only through God's Law do we know that we are sinners who deserve suffering. Only through God's Gospel do we know that Jesus suffered the wrath of God for our sin in our place. And only through God's Gospel are we enlightened to know that God counts us worthy to suffer for His name's sake. And only through the Holy Spirit working through Law and Gospel do we know that we have peace

with God. If you look to circumstances for this peace, you will have either pride or despair in which there is no peace or comfort.

Second, the Holy Spirit does not speak inside of you. His Word is an audible Word that comes to you from the outside. He speaks and it comes through your ear. Many look in their belly or heart or mind for the Holy Spirit's voice. But the Holy Spirit doesn't promise to speak there.

You might think, "Well, didn't God speak through visions and dreams in the Bible? This is certainly true. God gave dreams to Joseph and Pharaoh, Jacob and Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph and Pilate's wife. Three were believers and three were pagan unbelievers. God spoke through dreams about what He would do. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar had to have their dreams interpreted by prophets of the one true God. And in all these dreams, it affected more than just the person dreaming. All of these dreams were about what God was doing with and in Jesus. The fact that God sending dreams is rare and concerns the Person and work of Jesus should give you caution about whether you believe God is talking to you in a dream.

God gave visions to His prophets. Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel have especially vibrant visions about judgment on God's people and, just like the dreams, what He was doing in and through Jesus. Most of the prophetic books open with the words "And the Word of the Lord came to [insert prophet's name]." It is a bad assumption to think it was only in a dream or vision. More likely it was how the Word of the Lord came to Abraham and Samson's parents: that is, through the pre-incarnate Christ. An "Angel of the Lord" visited both Abraham and Samson's parents. We know that this was the pre-incarnate Christ because it clearly says in Genesis that the Lord stood before Abraham when he interceded for Lot and Sodom and because the Angel of the Lord accepted a sacrifice from Samson's parents. Yet God also sent angels to visit some people. An angel came to Zechariah to tell him of the birth of the forerunner of Christ. Gabriel visited Mary, the mother of our Lord. Hebrews says that we may entertain angels and not even know it! But again, these are rare events. And again, they all deal directly with what God is doing in and through Christ. This also should give you caution whether you think God is speaking to you in such a way.

We have something more sure than dreams or prophecies. As Peter says about the transfiguration which he witnessed firsthand, "We have something more sure, the prophetic word, [that is, the Bible], to which you would do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place." (1 Peter 1:19) John says that he wrote his gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, "so that may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.” (Jn 20:31) Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man [or woman] of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Jesus tells the parable of the rich and Lazarus and says through the mouth of Abraham, “They have Moses and the Prophets, [that is, the Old Testament;] let them hear them... If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:29, 31)

God, the Holy Spirit, certainly gives visions and dreams to some people, but He promises to speak through the Bible. So, we look for His voice there. Do not be like Aaron and Miriam who were jealous that God spoke through Moses and not through them. God spoke to Moses “mouth to mouth” and spoke to Aaron and Miriam through Moses. Miriam had to suffer 7 days of leprosy for her jealousy. (Numbers 12) You have the voice of Moses, the Prophets, Jesus Himself and His apostles. You truly have the one true voice of God. As with circumstances, if we look for God’s voice in visions and dreams, it can lead to either pride or despair. But God’s voice directly from the Scriptures is the only thing that can give you lasting peace.

And this isn’t to deny that you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. Baptism is fact that you have the Holy Spirit within you. Peter tells the men of Jerusalem on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) The fact that you believe in Jesus through the Scriptures is proof that you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. You remember Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Son of God sent by His Father to save us. Jesus says, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 16:17) It is the same with you when you make the same confession! We’ll talk more about how the Holy Spirit works in you next week, when we celebrate God giving us His Holy Spirit at the Feast of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit comforts us through His Word so that we might not fall away. He says this, in particular, to His apostles in our Gospel reading today. Except for John, most of the apostles will face horrible deaths because of their preaching. Jesus prepares them beforehand so that they might face their trials and suffering with faith and courage. You too will face trials and suffering and death. Jesus warns you so that you might face your trials and sufferings and death with faith and courage. And He gives you His Holy Spirit and His Word so that this might be possible.

As the Ezekiel reading we heard today testifies, God combines His Word with water to wash you clean from all your sin and give you a new heart. As we see in all the Bible, God causes His Word to go to the ends of the earth through proclamation so that sinners will hear, repent, and believe in Jesus. And to keep hearing and keep repenting and keep believing. With good reason, God warns us through Paul: “Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1 Cor 10:12) God gives His Word to pastors so that they might exercise the office of the keys to forgive and retain sins. And God combines His Word with bread and wine so that you receive Jesus bodily for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.

God gives so many good things with His Word because He knows your weakness. He knows that you still struggle with your sin. He knows you live in a world stained with the sin of others. He knows that you will suffer and die. And He gives you His Word, both audibly from the Scriptures and visibly with His Word combined with elements, so that you might know the peace of God that surpasses all understanding and that keeps you in all circumstances. Let me leave you with the Word of God delivered through St. Paul:

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom 1:16-17)

Amen.