

EASTER V (CANTATE) – MAY 2, 2021 – JOHN 16:5-15 (ESV)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, 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. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Just Who is the Holy Spirit? He's probably the Person of the Trinity that we know the least about. After all, just what exactly is a Spirit? Our culture treats spirits as a cross between something that haunts a house that's been vacant for a long time, and Casper the Friendly Ghost on the cartoons that we saw as a kid – a being with a white sheet over it's body, that can float through walls and generally scare people when it wants to. Needless to say, these two popular conceptions bear absolutely no resemblance to the Counselor, the Helper, that Jesus promises to send to us when He ascends into heaven. The Holy Spirit exists as the Person of the Trinity without a body, that enters into

us, creates and sustains faith in Christ the Redeemer in our hearts, and sustains it throughout our entire lives, until He delivers us into heavenly glory.

Now, we share the apprehension that the disciples were experiencing. We and they don't want Jesus to leave. We want to interact with a Man, the Savior of the world. The disciples were perfectly happy with His drawing the ire of the religious and political leaders; they were glad to "stand behind" Him as He contended for the true faith. All of this talk about Jesus going away didn't sit very well with them. As we learned last week, even though we will weep and mourn, while the rest of the world is joyous with glee, our mourning will be turned into dancing. Jesus would go away at His crucifixion and death, and would return at His resurrection. He would go away at His ascension, and will come back at the Last Day to judge both the living and the dead. He will not leave us defenseless, but rather will send us the One, the Holy Spirit, that is uniquely equipped to be the greatest Helper we could ever imagine.

You see, Jesus had to go away – to complete His life-giving, salvation-delivering work. If He didn't die, and rise again, we would still be in our sins. We would have no hope for eternal life; rather, we'd be destined for the fires of hell. If He didn't go away at His ascension, and prepare a place for us in heaven, we wouldn't be prepared for our own ascension at the end of our earthly days. It's all a part of God's gracious, loving, and all-encompassing plan, ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. The Father's love for us is so great, that He is not willing for us to perish, but has done everything to cause us to have eternal life with Him. Even though the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, we can be confident and know that God has already won the victory through Christ's resurrection and ascension. So, let's explore a little bit more about the Holy Spirit, what He does, and what motivates Him. In so doing, I think we can put to rest a few of our apprehensions and fears about Him, and make us more comfortable with His all-surpassing greatness and ever-present help in time of trouble.

What does Jesus tell us about what the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Helper, is coming into the world to do? He will convict the world – that is to say, He will apply the Law to our hearts and souls, and

make us aware of how completely corrupted we are, how much the image of God has been lost, and how this world no longer fears, loves and trusts in God above all things. He will convict the world with regard to sin – that’s the all-encompassing problem that we have. Not only do we break God’s Law every day of our lives, but we also delight in things that make Him hang His head in sorrow and shame. I don’t need to go into specifics here, but suffice it to say that every thought, word and deed that proceeds from our hearts is sinful to the core.

One of the main purposes of the Holy Spirit is to cause us to realize that all of us have a problem – we are at odds with God every hour, every minute of every day. Why is this? We think that we know better than God – we trust our own version of what we think is good for us – even though we don’t know any better. It’s kind of like a five year old child that never grew up – we’re self-centered, focused on our own pleasure at all costs – we don’t trust in God, we don’t put the needs of our neighbor before our own. It’s only when we’re brought to the depths of the knowledge of our sin that we realize how desperate and hopeless we really are. Ultimately, the result of sin is the lack of faith in the Redeemer – if we think that we’re just fine on our own, then we think that we don’t need a Savior. Why would we need to be saved from anything – we’re just fine. God hasn’t reached down from heaven and hit us with a bolt of lightning because of our sin – that must mean that He somewhat approves of us. And, anyway, I’m certainly not as evil as some other people in this world – relatively speaking, I’m just fine, right?

He will convict the world with regard to righteousness – God demands that we keep His Law perfectly, and the only perfect Man was Jesus. He never sinned, not even once – that’s a boast that NONE of us can make! He allowed Himself to be crucified, and was buried, and rose again on the Third day – in our place, as our substitute. The Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us that Jesus did this FOR YOU, when you could not do anything about your sinful condition. It required a death for the sin of the world to be paid for. That death was provided for by the God-Man, Jesus – He was the only One that

could die and rise again, because He not only is man, but also God. Your sins are placed on the beaten, bloodied body of Christ on the cross, and died with Him. Jesus is the definition of righteousness, that is, good and upright according to the objective standard of God's Law. We are not righteous – we are the opposite of righteous, in fact, because of the sinful nature. Because God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice in our place, we know that He deemed it perfect and enough to pay the price of the sins of the world.

He will convict the world with regard to judgment – just like the evil one has been thrown into hell, the place of torment and the complete absence of God, this is an object lesson for us of the absolute contempt that God has for sin. He cannot abide with it! It cannot be in His perfect presence of heaven!

The Spirit will help us to see that these things have taken place – He will bring us to the point of repentance for our sinful selves. That's where we need to be in order for the Spirit to rush in with the Gospel of the forgiveness of all of our sins.

The Spirit does what the Father wills, and repeats what He hears – the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Just like John the Baptist, only even more fully because the Holy Spirit is God, He points the way to Christ, the Redeemer, the only hope for sinful mankind. After He's brought us to the point of despair because of our sin, He immediately lifts us out of this miry pit, and restores us the hope of righteousness before God. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to keep the centrality of Christ in His church, and in your hearts and souls. All of this, the Bible, the ministry of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit – it's all meaningless without the Savior, the Christ of God, the Redeemer, and His work of salvation on our behalf. That's why the Holy Spirit spends so much time working in our hearts and souls to make Christ the center – He's the only One that matters. It's not about the Holy Spirit – He's the servant of all – His only desire is to do the will of the Father (to save us from our sins) and to point to Christ (the hope of the world)

Jesus even reminds us that the Holy Spirit can do more for us than even Jesus Himself can do – if that were possible. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in our hearts. Completely out of nothing, out of death, He causes faith to be present where there previously was none at all – that’s how powerful and effective the Holy Spirit’s work is. He sustains that faith throughout our entire earthly lives – faith in Christ, and what He has done, even though the devil tries to snatch it away, nullify it, cast doubt upon it

The Holy Spirit underpins the Word and the Sacraments – God’s gifts to us – where we are told to look for the Counselor, where He can be assuredly found. The writers of the Sacred Scriptures wrote what the Holy Spirit told them to write, as they were carried along by Him. The Spirit gave them the thoughts, the main ideas, to write about, and then they used the knowledge and skill that they had been given to write exactly what God wanted to be written – not more, not less. Therefore, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit works through His Word to create and sustain faith – the Word of God is powerful, after all, the only offensive weapon mentioned by Paul in the armor of God.

Because the Word of God causes the Sacraments to be real and powerful, the Holy Spirit is also the author and sustainer of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In Baptism, He washes away our sins, and instills faith in Christ in their place. In the Lord’s Supper, He feeds us with the Body and Blood of Jesus, the fruits of His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, in, with and under the bread and wine

He guides us into all truth – using our conscience and our newly-created faithful hearts. He produces any good works that proceed from us – gradually and more and more as the Last Day approaches. The ability for anything that we do to be considered a good work is that it is done to the glory of God, for the benefit of our neighbor, and that it is done in faith. Otherwise, it’s not a good work! The Holy Spirit turns our puny, selfish attempts at serving God into marvelous works by His power, and His transformation of our motives. He gradually makes us desire the things of God more and more, and puts to death the desires of the flesh, which only serve to corrupt us and drive us further from God.

We're going to hear more about the Holy Spirit as we continue through this Easter season, until we reach the Day of Pentecost – the birthday of the Christian church. There we celebrate the conversion of thousands of souls from unbelief to faith in Christ, when the Holy Spirit came down in a visible form, and alighted upon the New Testament Christians with tongues as of fire. But, this is a “sneak preview” of the Holy Spirit’s festival that’s coming up in just a few short weeks. There are many things that we cannot bear right now – our finite minds can only handle so much of the truth of God and His kingdom of heaven. We’d only get confused, overwhelmed, and be dissuaded from the truth if we knew even a share of the totality of God’s essence. But, as John tells us later on in his Gospel, “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.” That’s what the Holy Spirit does – He causes us to believe in Jesus, the Savior. He works in our hearts to transform them from lifeless lumps to useful clay in the hands of the great Potter, God Himself. He molds us into the image that He wants us to have, thereby fulfilling the desire of the Father, through the working of the Son. In short, He has done everything for our salvation. All that’s left for us to do is to thank and praise, serve and obey Him, and He has even created this within us by the working of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for all His marvelous works among us! Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.