

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.

²⁶[Jesus said:] But when the Helper 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. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. ¹ I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

We've been talking these last few weeks about the coming of the Counselor, the promised Holy Spirit. We will mark this occasion next Sunday on the Day of Pentecost, the feast that celebrates thousands of people being converted to faith in Jesus and His actions on the cross for our salvation. However, this dovetails with the end of the Easter season that is upon us, where we remember that it's all about the Resurrection. Without Jesus rising from the dead, we'd have no hope whatsoever. We'd be dead in our trespasses and sins, with nothing to look forward to except death and the grave. However, because Christ is risen from the dead, we have a hope that cannot be quenched, an anticipation that only grows stronger with ever passing day, because, in the words of St. Paul, the Last Day is nearer now than when we first believed. It might seem that we've been going out of order in our progression through John's 15th and 16th chapters; however, the folks that set up this historic lectionary centuries ago knew what they were doing. We've talked about some of the specific promises that Jesus

gives to His disciples about the coming of the Spirit after He is ascended into heaven; now, we focus today on the most important promise yet. The devil will throw everything he has at us; but God Himself fights for us, and will deliver us, in His time and according to His will, into heavenly glory.

However, before that time, things will begin to look pretty bleak. Jesus gives some examples here of severe persecution that lies in store for the saints of God in His church here on earth. He tells the disciples that they will be thrown out of the synagogues, and that whoever kills one of them will be regarded as doing a service for God and His church. That's pretty bad, isn't it? As we know, all of the apostles, save John, were martyred for the faith in one way or another. That means that the authorities thought that a better outcome for these men was to kill them, rather than allow them to continue on preaching the Gospel of Jesus to the nations. When Paul traveled around to the various communities on his missionary journeys, he first started by speaking with folks in the Temple courts, trying to convince people that they should believe in the Risen Son of God, rather than waiting for the Savior to yet come. But, this didn't bear much fruit, and he was shown the door pretty soon after his arrival in most cases. Rather than allowing this to silence his missionary activity, he then went on to speak in the marketplaces, in private homes, anywhere that people would gather and listen to what he had to say. In Corinth, the synagogue leader was one of the early converts, and Paul would conduct his "house church" worship services next door to the Temple. Talk about location, location, location!

We, too, should expect to be hated for the name of Christ which we bear. This might take place within or outside the body of believers. There are some voices that will say that we should just negotiate with the culture of death that surrounds us, capitulating to their desires, until our church doesn't even resemble the place of Word and Sacrament that God Himself intends it to be. Jesus tells us that we may be hated in the community, labeled as "intolerant" when we take stances on His Word. But, as long as you are standing firm in the faith, in the teachings of the Scriptures, you should take this ostracism, this criticism, as a badge of honor. It means that if those who are opposed to the Word of

God are that offended, you might be on the right track! Jesus tells us that the reason that they do this is because they do not know the Father, nor Him. That's a pretty scathing critique, now isn't it? This is difficult for us, and it's easy for us to be discouraged, because this is what satan wants to do. He wants us to cower in our own little corner, he wants us to only speak of those things that are uncontroversial, and doesn't want us to be the beacons of light in a world that's steeped in darkness. And what is Jesus telling us in this passage? He calls us to be courageous, to keep the true confession, and to realize that the strength to do any of this comes from the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, that has come into our midst and will always be with us. No matter what the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may try to mislead us into thinking, the clear Word of God, the right administration of the Sacraments, and the clear, unadulterated faith, must be proclaimed in season and out of season. Let's take a look at this passage from John's Gospel, and from our Epistle reading for this day from 1 Peter, and see what God would have us learn from them, and use going forward, as we continue to confess the truth that we've been given.

What does the Holy Spirit do? What's His primary activity among us? Why is this shift happening, from Jesus speaking to the disciples, to the Holy Spirit interacting with them? He will speak of what He sees, and testify to what He has seen, concerning Jesus the Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is similar to that of John the Baptist – to point to Jesus, to have himself decrease, so that Christ may increase. The Holy Spirit is God, and so he would be entitled to exalt Himself, and His power, unlike John the Baptist, who was merely the last and greatest prophet to ever walk the earth. But, the Holy Spirit prefers to remain in the background, and only be visible in infrequent and specific times and places.

Why is it so important that the Holy Spirit speak of Christ? Because He is the difference-maker – without the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we would still be in our sins; we would not have things be made right between us and God. The Spirit works to create and sustain faith in your heart – faith in Christ as the only reason for your salvation. The entire Scripture makes sense in light of Christ – He was

the only One that could die (fully man); He was the only One that could rise again, and have His perfect, sinless life count for us (fully God). Because He was and is the God-Man, He is uniquely equipped to carry out this work. There's nothing we can do about our sins; but everything has been done for you by Christ the Savior

The reason that the Holy Spirit comes to us, and Christ ascends into heaven, is because Jesus had completed His work, and was ascending back to His rightful seat of authority in heaven, at the right hand of the Father. Up until that point, the disciples had Jesus directly with them – to speak with them, to teach them, to equip them to be His first pastors (you might say that their three years with Him was the first seminary instruction ever held in the New Testament era!). They didn't need the Holy Spirit, when they had the very Son of God right beside them. But, when He ascended into heaven, they needed the reassurance, the strength, the courage that only the Holy Spirit could give. Therefore, He sent the Helper to them – don't forget, the Spirit is still fully God – it wasn't that He is somehow second-rate to the Son – Jesus was leaving them in good hands! Jesus knew that persecution would be coming, and that the disciples (and us, living in these Last Days) would need all the encouragement, all the strength, all the endowment with the gifts that God alone can give.

Let's look at a couple of "case studies", where specific persecution is alluded to in this passage, not only in the "near term" (very soon after this in the life of Christ), but also later on in the life of the church, and even today. The Holy Spirit specializes in this giving us a "faith that will not shrink", in the words of the hymn; will not shrink away from the fight contending for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even against impossible odds. Jesus alludes to His coming Passion in the last verse of this text – *"But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."*

Remember when Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? He instructed His disciples not to draw the sword, because He could have summoned legions of angels to defeat these soldiers, if that had been the Father's will. What came after that? He told them that they could have arrested Him

numerous times in the Temple courts, and that He wouldn't have resisted them. But, "this is your hour and the hour of darkness." The devil was leading the charge at that point; the evil one thought that he could prevail against God by having these men arrest, beat, and kill the Lord of Life. Even when the apostles were scattering, one after another, they had the words of Jesus ringing in their ears from this encouraging message in John 16, to take with them in their flight. The Holy Spirit was coming to equip them to contend for the faith, to guard and keep the Gospel in their hearts and souls, that was placed there in the beginning by God in Holy Baptism, and kept and sustained there by His actions, not theirs.

We can find an allusion to all of the great and faithful teachers of the church throughout the ages – think of Martin Luther and the other Reformers. Against all odds, they opposed the Emperor to his face when they confessed the truth doctrine of the ancient church at the Diet of Augsburg, the Diet of Worms, and on various other occasions during the 16th century and beyond. Martin Luther himself was even branded an outlaw. What did that mean? It would mean that anyone that killed Luther would be doing a benefit to the church. How prophetic Jesus is.

What Jesus is telling us here is that we might be called upon to give up our lives here on earth. It may very well come to a point where our stance, our public confession, is so hated by the world, that folks might not think twice about killing us for the Name of Christ which we bear. While we pray that this wouldn't happen, on the other hand, we pray that we'd have the internal fortitude, or "guts", to remain faithful in such a day. That's why the Holy Spirit has come – to make us, and keep us, strong in the faith until we die.

Let's let Peter sum this up for us. Beginning with verse 12: *"¹² 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. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."* The disciples were given the gift of this perspective, as they lived in a time

when the Gospel of Jesus was despised and ridiculed, and those who spoke it were ostracized. We pray that we would be given the same measure of faith and courage in our own day. Jesus promised that the Last Days would be filled with trial, temptation and suffering. But, we can rejoice that He has overcome the world – that's all that truly matters. He truly has done everything for our salvation. 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.