

On this day, we celebrate motherhood. We remember and give thanks for our mothers. There is a particular mother whom we as Christians can appreciate on this day: the holy Church. The Church is our mother. This is a teaching of the Bible. In Galatians, St. Paul contrasts the enslaved descendants of Hagar with the free children of Sarah. He uses that picture of Hagar and Sarah to illustrate his point. He is speaking of those who clung to the Law of Moses, which binds in sin and cannot set free, and those born of God, not according to the flesh, but by faith in God's promise. He is speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church, and says, "**the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother**" (Gal 4:26). Just a few weeks ago on the first Sunday after Easter we heard in the Epistle that Christians are to be as newborn babes, craving the pure milk of the Word. Where is that given? By Christ in the temple of the living God, His body, assembled, gathered together, "**built up as a spiritual house**" (1 Pet 2:2–5).

A third century bishop in North Africa by the name of Cyprian made the statement: "No one can have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother." How is it that you are born of God? Through the new birth of Holy Baptism and through the preaching of God's Word. That is what the Church does. That is where it happens. In the *Large Catechism* Luther writes that the Holy Spirit "leads us first into His holy congregation and places us in the bosom of the Church. Through the Church He preaches to us and brings us to Christ" (LC II, 37). Notice how Luther speaks of the Church as a maternal figure. Just as a mother alone possesses that unique capability to nourish her newborn child, has that unique, irreplaceable role in the whole life of her child, so the Church is for a Christian. This is the place of that consolation and spiritual nourishment that cannot be provided anywhere else.

And this is exactly what our Lord speaks of in the Holy Gospel. He describes what the work of the Holy Spirit that takes place in the Church is. The Holy Spirit "**declares.**" That is to say, He speaks. And through this speaking He takes what is Christ's and bestows it upon you. The Holy Spirit, quite simply, gives you Jesus and all that belongs to Him. So if you ever hear something that purports to be "spiritual," or encounter someone or something that claims to be "spirit filled," and it is not about Jesus, does not give to you what Jesus has accomplished for you, then you can be absolutely certain that it is *not* the Holy Spirit at work there. Jesus says: the Holy Spirit "**will take what is Mine and declare it to you**" (Jn 16:15).

The Church is filled with the speaking of the Word of God. The Spirit does three things through this Word: He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This preaching is directed to the world, to everyone. Just as God sent His only Son because He loved the world, and the Son, the Lamb of God, took upon Himself the sin of the world, so the message of the Church is for the whole world. It's first about sin. THE sin. Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will convict the world "**concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.**" The conviction the Spirit works in us, His speaking regarding who we are, first shows us who are without faith or the knowledge of Christ. All people, regardless of who they are, the whole world, stands before the judgment of God as under His wrath, carrying the sentence of damnation, and there is no deliverance from this apart from Christ. All your virtues, good works, minding your manners, is useless before God. It avails nothing before Him.

But to those who confess, who say "Amen," and agree to what God's Word says of us, there is another declaration, the declaration of the righteousness. The boundless goodness and compassion of God for us in sending His dear Son from heaven to relieve and help us, to take our sin and damnation upon Himself, to make payment and reconcile God to us by sacrificing His body and blood, this delivers you and grants you mercy from God. That is what faith lays hold of. God's promises of forgiveness and life through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through those promises, the Holy Spirit gives what the words say.

Finally, perhaps the most perplexing of these three convictions is that the Spirit will convict the world "**concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**" This simply means that the world is dead wrong, confused, mixed up, about what is true. The judgment of the world is based purely on the eyes and experience. Here's some examples of the judgment of the world:

If you're suffering, you must have done something wrong, and so God has it out for you, or He has abandoned you, or is unable to defend His people from their enemies.

More people think two men or two women can marry. That must be fine then. We should change, we don't want to be on the losing side of history.

The church keeps getting smaller. All the older people are dying and we don't have enough new young people coming in. The church is dying!

All that, is the judgment of the world. But such worldly judgments will not prevail. If you suffer the wrath and condemnation of men, trust in what God has said of you. He is master not just of your body, but of your soul. And if your body suffers, wastes away, and yes, eventually dies, your God has promised to raise it up again to incorruption. The resurrection of Jesus has promised this to you!

All human history testifies that denying what God has written into our created nature does not end well. God has created humanity as man and woman, and from that union comes life. You get no human life without a man and a woman. That is not bigotry, that's biology, not some mere scientific theory, but written more solid than stone by He who is life itself. All the madness of our #woke age cannot undo God's created order.

And what of that last example? Even Christian eyes see the state of many a congregation, and what those eyes see leads to panic, to the idea that we must take some drastic step to preserve the church, take surveys and implement the felt needs of the surrounding community, find out what kind of music the young people like and bring that into the church, or whatever other nonsense has been repeated since the 1970s and has done nothing to slow the decline. What has Christ said? **"The gates of hell shall not prevail against"** His Church.

And what of deaths, especially as those Boomers get older and older? Every time a Christian dies in the faith, that is not a loss, it is a permanent gain for the Church Triumphant. Those saints whose bodies now sleep in death will never sin, never fall away. The Church is always growing. It is never shrinking. And what of the seeming fewer hearers? The Church always proclaims the Gospel to unbelievers, but it is the Spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness. He is the one who works faith when and where it pleases Him. And our Lord Himself has said **"My Sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"** (Jn 10:27). Conversion, the salvation of souls, is done through the Church, no doubt about that, you cannot become a Christian apart from, without, the Church. This is where we are born to God and strengthened in that Life. But it is God Himself who does it. And none of those whom the Father has given to the Son will be lost.

Here, gathered to our holy mother the Church, we hear the tough truth, what is at times hard to believe. Not so different from our earthly mothers, no? She has no problem telling us when we've done wrong, and we do best to listen up! Yet there is no sweeter voice of comfort, no surer word consolation that we hear from her. And unlike in this life, we rejoice in that promise of the day when all things will be put to right: "Just wait till your Father gets here!"

And as your mother did when you were young, so mother Church teaches us to sing of all this. Not silly ditties that we grow out of or roll our eyes over their childishness, but solid, lifelong truths set to music. Our mother the Church puts the Word of God on our lips, and so we sing it into our hearts. We sing of sin, forgiveness, and the Lord's return in glory. We sing of Jesus! So we give thanks on this day, as we gather to be with our mother, the public assembly of the redeemed, the holy bride sought by Her heavenly Bridegroom, bought by His own blood, having our life from His death for us.