

## Sermon for the Easter 4 – John 16:5-15

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

The first disciples in the New Testament had Jesus. As God would walk with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day, so also God walked with His disciples in the gardens, roads, and cities of the ancient Middle East. Jesus was their comfort and their strength. He healed the sick. He cleansed lepers. He calmed the storm. He fed the multitudes. He cast out demons and gave His apostles the authority to do so. And when they lacked faith to cast out demons, He did it. Most importantly, the Lord forgave sins and welcomed everyone into His kingdom. The children and infants brought to the Lord by eager parents weren't baptized in that moment. Yet, when the Lord blessed them, they were made partakers of His kingdom. He was there in the flesh to welcome them. Likewise, when the thief on the cross bid the Lord, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," this thief was not baptized then; yet, the Lord's promise did the job: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

However, in today's Gospel, Christ tells His disciples that those days of His walking with them and dwelling in their midst are coming to an end: "... I am going to Him who sent Me ...". The Lord was taken away from them in death. Yet after His resurrection, He appeared in the flesh to His disciples in the locked room with St. Thomas bearing ample witness to this truth. Within the forty days after His resurrection, Paul states that Christ appeared to Peter, James, the other apostles and disciples, and over 500 brothers at one time. After these forty days, at His ascension, He was taken up into a cloud. This was the last they would see of Him walking on earth. When Christ was gone, how would He comfort and strengthen His disciples? How would He welcome mankind into His kingdom? How would God forgive sins?

Our Lord replies: "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." Christ would leave, but He would not leave His disciples alone. He would send the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the original Greek calls the *para-clay-tos* or Paraclete. The Holy Spirit continues the ministry of Jesus. He comforts and strengthens. He opens the kingdom. He forgives sins through qualified men placed into Christ's office, so that Christ's ministry will continue. The Spirit points all people to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ for them. The Spirit also points all people away from their own reason and strength. He enlightens with His gifts: Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. The Lord Himself was His disciple's Comforter through His Bodily Presence before their eyes; now He is still present with His disciples through the gifts of the Spirit. Blessed are all those who see and receive Christ through these gifts!

The Spirit works through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. But just how does He do that? The Lord tells us: "... [The Holy Spirit] 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 ...” “He will convict the world concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.” We like to take the “they” and think of all those non-Christians out there in the world. “Not me,” we say, “I believe.” But are we not in the world? Are we not also convicted of sin? Are we not also the “they who do not believe in me?” St. James said in today’s Epistle reading: “Do not be deceived, dearly beloved ... know this ... let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.” The anger of man cannot produce the righteousness of God. Today we call the “anger of man” “holding a grudge” or refusing to forgive someone else. This is the “anger of man” that falsely convicts others. But it’s only the Spirit who is to convict the world concerning sin; it’s only the Word that should execute judgment and vengeance. But we don’t believe that the Word will work. We don’t believe that the Spirit will turn hearts to repentance. So we execute our own homemade justice by holding a grudge. We put ourselves in the place of the True Judge to execute vengeance as we see fit. We don’t believe in Christ and His Word, and that’s the root of all sin. How long will we remain in stubborn pride and refuse to believe in our humble and merciful God? How long will we refuse to love God through our neighbor?

“The anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.” And so the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning righteousness, because Christ is going to the Father and we will see Him no longer. By Christ’s righteousness, He ascends to the Father. He was perfect. He was pure. He was holy. None of us can compare to Him. In righteousness, He came to us from the Father. In righteousness, He walked this earth. In righteousness, He gave up His life. And we have no part in Christ’s righteousness, if not for the Holy Spirit. Jesus made us the promise that the righteousness He earned is ours by the Spirit: “... He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

In Holy Baptism, you died and your life was hidden with Christ in God. In Holy Absolution, you died to sin and the new man emerged and arose. In the Sacrament of the Altar, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes to give you eternal life. The Head cannot be separated from the Body. If Christ died, you died with Him. If Christ rose, you rise with Him. If Christ ascended, you ascend with Him. We cannot regard ourselves as separated from the righteousness of our Lord when He speaks of convicting the world of righteousness when He goes to the Father, because we are joined to Christ as a Body to a Head. Our certain hope in Christ’s resurrection from the dead will be fulfilled in our own resurrection, because by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are one with Him. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠