

The Day of Pentecost

John 16:4b-15

May 23, 2021

And when he comes, he 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; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

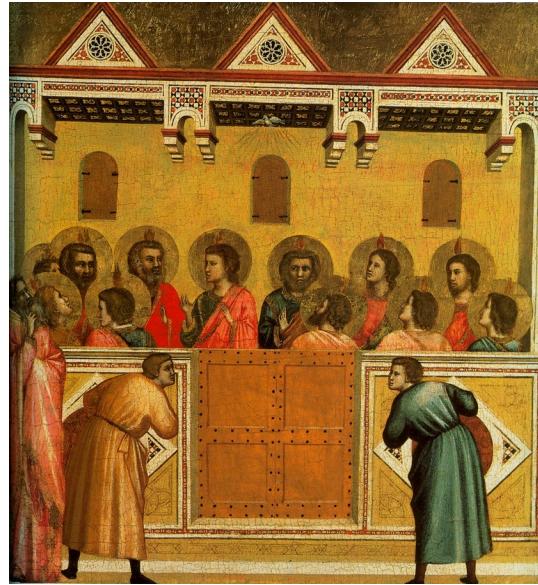
Jn 16:8-11

A Spirit of Action

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

We worship one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do?

The answer to this question is helpfully given to us by our Lord in St. John's Gospel which we read on this Day of Pentecost from the sixteenth chapter. Nevertheless it seems that many Christians aren't satisfied with what our Saviour teaches us, and instead they seek something else. Something more dramatic, something more emotional, something more sensational. In the early church we do indeed hear of the Holy Spirit bringing forth signs and wonders. The first time is on that day in Jerusalem when many were gathered for the feast of Pentecost, or the "feast of weeks," celebrated 50 days after the passover. Pentecost was one of three pilgrimage festivals we hear about in the Old Testament, when individuals were to appear before the Lord with gifts and offerings. This festival was primarily a harvest festival and



celebrated the end of the barely harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. So we take the name of the Christian festival day from this celebration on the Jewish calendar, a time of great rejoicing and gathering at the temple when no work was to be done.

Of course for Christians the day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church, that day when the promised Holy Spirit arrived on the scene in a miraculous way and people who were gathered from all over could “speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”¹ St. Luke, the master of detail, lists no less than 15 ethnicities or nations represented in this amazing demonstration of the Spirit’s power. But we must not miss the content of what they were speaking: “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”² This was not an occasion for ceaseless unintelligible babbling. The Holy Spirit brought forth the Gospel message, and starting that day it would go out to entire world. That’s what happened, that’s the point. And this fulfills what Jesus said about the coming of the Holy Spirit. For He is a Spirit of action. The Holy Spirit has come to do great things. The Holy Spirit is active, now and tomorrow, in and with and through the Church of Jesus Christ.

So looking at our Gospel reading in St. John we hear all about this action. Here in these few verses Jesus tells the disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit by describing what the Spirit will do when He arrives on the scene. He will convict, guide, speak, glorify, and declare. Let’s look at each one of these and then tie them

¹ Ac 2:4.

² Ac 2:11.

altogether. First, the word “convict” brings to mind the criminal justice system. People are “convicted” of crimes in a court of law. We might refer to prison inmates as “convicts,” or those who have been “convicted.” The way Jesus uses this word to describe the action of the Holy Spirit is not far off from those descriptions. You see, in the New Testament this word always means to show someone his or her sin and to summon him or her to repentance. Here Jesus says the Holy Spirit will “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”³ He then goes on to explain this for us. The Holy Spirit will convict the world “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me”⁴ What does He mean? Notice where the focus is. The focus is not on outward conduct, although surely God’s Law serves as a sure and certain mirror against all manner of murder, theft, adultery, slander – the things we see in the second table of the Ten Commandments. Instead Jesus is pointing to the fountainhead and source of what Luther says are the “chief sins.” Jesus goes to the very core, to man’s heart, to false worship, contempt of God, unbelief, disobedience, evil lust, resistance to God’s command, and what St. Paul calls the “mind that is set on the flesh” which is “hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law.”⁵ The Holy Spirit comes and pronounces the sentence – the conviction – by the Word of God. Here is it: all people remain under God’s wrath and under His sentence of judgement from which they cannot be delivered, unless by faith they believe in Christ. In this way people bring about their own destruction. Refusal to receive the gracious gift of the Saviour, who

³ Jn 16:8.

⁴ Jn 16:9.

⁵ Ro 8:7.

abolishes our sin and damnation, results in the conviction, the pronounced sentence of judgement. Here Jesus shows us that salvation and judgement hinge on the faith that grasps hold of Christ and His promise of forgiveness, or in the exact opposite – the refusal to acknowledge one’s sins and seek refuge in grace freely given for the sake of Christ.

But then immediately Jesus brings another word that stands in direct contrast to this wrath and judgement of God. The Holy Spirit will also convict the world “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer.”⁶ What is this righteousness that Jesus speaks of? This is the very righteousness of God, which is far different from anything recognized by the world. For this righteousness is not something you earn, not something that comes with accolades and adoring crowds. This is the righteousness that comes to us because Christ has gone to the Father. This is nothing else than Christ’s assumption of our sins: His crucifixion, and burial, His descent into hell and His resurrection and ascension into heaven. He did not do these things for His own sake, but instead for yours. Our righteousness is only found in what He has accomplished for us, for He has removed the just sentence of the Law and replaced it with the promise of forgiveness and peace and eternal life. This is what faith must grab onto, it must be built on this and nothing else, and it must take comfort in this during times of trial and tribulation, and when the devil comes with that accusing voice: “What kind of Christian are you, anyway?” Here is the response: I am Baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, and although surely there is no

⁶ Jn 16:10.

righteousness in me on my own, but Jesus has told me that in His going to the Father my righteousness is secure in Him.” This is the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convicts us of this glorious Good News of the righteousness of God which is now our in Christ Jesus. So then the Holy Spirit also convicts “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”⁷ Since you have received the righteousness that Christ has won for you the devil no longer has any claim on your life. In fact, he is powerless over you. In His going to the Father Jesus has defeated the power of this enemy once and for all. “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”⁸ Here again the Holy Spirit is at work, for we who are in Christ are convicted – we have the assurance – of the devil’s judgement.

Jesus names the Holy Spirit “Comforter” and “the Spirit of truth.” The Holy Spirit comes as One who appears on and in another person’s behalf. That person is Jesus. That person is also you. For Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes He will serve the Son, and 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.”⁹ If you are headed into uncharted territory, or into a big city where you have never been before, or into a country where the language and culture are drastically different, then you are happy to have a guide, someone to show you the way. This was the situation for the disciples now that Jesus was returning to the Father. The territory ahead was uncharted, the Church would be brought into being

7 Jn 16:11.

8 Jn 12:31.

9 Jn 16:13.

by the Word of God in the blink of an eye, according to the mandate of Christ, and now they needed a guide into this unknown territory. And so Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be there with them every step of the way. How? In the proclamation of the Word. In the bringing forth of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the very Sacraments Christ Himself instituted. The Guiding Spirit leads to the trail of truth, and the truth is Christ.

Today it seems like that trail is disappearing. Our culture's relentless shift away from Christianity makes daily life bewildering. We used to hold in common much with the world, things like marriage, male, female, but even these are no longer so clear. Public

reception of the Christian faith has also changed. From new atheists who think we are ignorant and anti-science to public protestors who denounce us as hateful and homophobic advocates of patriarchy and white supremacy, the way is bewildering.

We need to know that we are still heading in the right direction. We need a signpost, a mark on a tree, a pile of rocks on a trail. Jesus send us the Holy Spirit to be our guide, to lead us on the this way of truth, and to keep us there. The subject and content of the Holy Spirit's guidance is built on the foundation which is Christ. His one mission will be to glorify Christ, which means that He will be recognized and believed and praised. This is the mark of the Holy Spirit. He takes what belongs to Christ, which He in turn received from the Father, and gives it to you. All His sermons, all His revelations, all His worship, will show that they are taken from God. They will point to Christ. They will not point to any other. The Holy Spirit is True God together with Christ and the Father. His office and message proceed from the

Father and the Son, as we confess in the Nicene Creed. Everything that He brings us is of Christ, and of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of action. This is the meaning of our Pentecost celebration. We have these truths from the work of the Spirit: Jesus is the Son of God; He has been vindicated by the Father in His death and resurrection; He now sits at the right hand of the Father and rules over all things. By the Holy Spirit we are convicted of our sins and by faith repent and receive the forgiveness of our sins. By the Holy Spirit we hear the Word of God preached, and read it for ourselves when we open the Bible, and we believe with our hearts. Jesus told the disciples, “All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”¹⁰ The same holds true for you today. The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of action, comes today declaring Christ and the message that belongs to Him. May we always look to Spirit and pray, “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.”¹¹ Amen.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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¶ Soli Deo Gloria

10 Jn 16:15.

11 Ps 25:5.