

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

ANNO ⁂ DOMINI 2022

John 16:5-15

Today's Gospel lesson takes us back in time to Maundy Thursday, the night on which our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed. It is after supper. Jesus has washed His disciples' feet. And they are on their way to the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus says, "But now I am going to the One who sent Me" (16:5). He is going to the *Father*, who at the right time sent forth His Son to redeem the world. As we just confessed in the Creed, Jesus, after He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.

But not only is He going away, He says to His disciples, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now" (13:36). He is leaving them behind. And once He is gone, He says, "They will persecute you because of Me" (15:20). And in the verses leading up to our text, He says, "Indeed the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God" (16:4).

And the disciples hear this as *bad* news. Jesus says, "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart" (16:6). With Jesus gone, they would seem to be at a *disadvantage*! Who would help them when they were in need? Teach them when they were confused? Comfort them when they were afraid? This helps explain what Jesus means when He says, "and none of you asks Me, 'Where are you going?'" In fact, both Peter and Thomas have asked Jesus that question in the last few chapters (13:36; 14:5), but by it they have meant something like, "How can you *leave* us?" They are focused on Jesus' *departure*, not His destination.

Jesus is focused on His destination—the "where," if you will. He is going to the Father, and that's a *good* thing, He says. "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" (16:7). The Helper is none other than the *Holy Spirit*, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, true God, along with the Father and the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but *proceeding*. The Son, after He is gone, will send forth the Holy Spirit, and it will most definitely be to their *advantage*.

But first He must go away. As Jesus said to the crowd on the last day of the Feast of Booths, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of His heart will flow rivers of living water.'" And John the Evangelist had commented, "Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus

was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39). “Now is the Son of Man glorified,” Jesus said at the beginning of His Passion, His suffering for the sake of the world (John 13:31). His glory is the cross. Without it, there would be no help, no living water. But He goes to die, to rise again, and to ascend, in order to send sinners the help they need.

And the advantage, He says, will be threefold: “when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (16:8). He will show the world how wrong it has been about what is wrong, about what is right, and about who won.

First, He will convict the world concerning sin. Sin is when we think, say, or do anything against God’s will. At best, the world counts as sinful the things forbidden in the *Second* Table of the Law, things like murder, adultery, and gossip. And those things are wrong, although with our culture’s increasing acceptance of things like abortion, fornication, and defamation, or slander, that opinion is becoming even more rare. The Law may be written on our hearts (Romans 2:15), but it is getting harder and harder to read. “If it had not been for the law,” writes the Apostle Paul, “I would not have known sin” (Romans 7:7).

But there are two types of sin. One is actual, the sins we actually commit against one another. But Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes “He will convict the world concerning sin, *because they do not believe in Me*” (16:9). Yes, murder is bad. Adultery is bad. Hurting someone else’s reputation is bad. But the absolute worst thing you can do is not believe in Jesus. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:17-18). Faith is not a matter of freedom or indifference. It’s a matter of life and death. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we *must* be saved” (Acts 4:12). And since we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, it is to our advantage that He went away, that He might send the Holy Spirit to *give* us faith by the Gospel. He has helped your unbelief.

Next, Jesus says, He will send the Holy Spirit to convict the world “concerning righteousness” (John 16:10). If the world is so wrong about what is wrong, then it is also wrong about what is *right*. Jesus often called out the scribes and Pharisees for their self-righteousness, their mistaken belief that they had earned God’s favor by their obedience to the Law. We are often deceived by this notion as well, that it is by our own works that we are saved.

But no matter what right thing you *think* you've done, it is nothing compared to the work of *Christ*. "He will convict the world concerning righteousness," Jesus says, "because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer." Cast out and rejected by His own, the Holy and Righteous One was raised from the dead (Acts 3:14-15). Thus He was "justified in the Spirit" (1 Timothy 3:16), "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Christ's going to the Father, then, implies that all that He said and did was *true*. He lived a perfect life, according to the Law. If it were not so, then Christ would not have been able to ascend the hill of the Lord! But the gates of heaven were lifted up, and the King of glory has come in. The Father *accepted* His Son's sacrifice. It was the most right thing that has ever happened.

And it happened for *you*. "He became sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). That's the first advantage. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart* from the Law...the righteousness of God through *faith in Jesus Christ* for all who *believe*" (Romans 3:21, 22). Through faith, God gifts you the right things *He* has done, so that you are holy and righteous in His sight. On your own, your righteousness would never measure up. But because Jesus went to the Father, you have this advantage as well: you are justified.

Finally, "He will convict the world concerning judgment" (16:11). On the cross, there was indeed an act of judgment passed before the eyes of the world. Jesus seemed to be judged and forsaken by God as a criminal. "We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted," we read in the Prophet Isaiah (53:4). This is why we find the disciples hiding behind locked doors on Easter evening: they believed they had lost.

But in reality it is not Christ, the Prince of Life, who is judged, but the Prince of this world, the devil. The devil is real. He is a formidable enemy, who wants nothing more than to deceive and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. But he is a *defeated* enemy. Satan may have struck Jesus' heel, but the serpent's head has been *crushed*. His power is broken, and sinners are rescued, as God first promised back in the garden (Genesis 3:15). "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). He has won. It's been decided. And thanks be to God, who gives *us* the victory *through* our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 7:25).

And then, as sort of a bonus, Jesus tells His disciples just how it is that all these things will be *accomplished*. He says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, for 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" (16:12-15).

The Spirit does not work apart from means. He convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment through the *Word*, the same Word that we have heard from this morning. The Bible wasn't just written by anyone, it was written by those who were *there*, who were *eyewitnesses* of the events they describe. How could they possibly have recalled all that information years later? They had an advantage: the Spirit of truth guided them into all truth. He inspired them to preach boldly and to write every word of the New Testament. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

And that gives us boldness and confidence to believe it. We can trust God's Word, knowing that it is so inspired. We can teach God's Word, knowing that it is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. We can rest in God's Word, which is the word of Christ, bringing peace to troubled and anxious hearts.

Our Lord has gone away, but it is to our advantage. And it will not be long anyway until He comes again in glory, and *all* that is His will become ours. And *then* we will follow Him into eternal life, and our hearts will forever sing for joy.

In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria