

John 16:5–15  
Cantate  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
May 7, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

As the festivals of Ascension and Pentecost approach, our Gospel readings for this season again take us back to Maundy Thursday, in the Upper Room, where our Lord tells His disciples what to expect in the near future. Jesus was preparing His disciples for a major change with His suffering, death, and resurrection. Our Lord's Resurrection is the source of eternal joy, yet Jesus would not remain walking the earth in His resurrected body. The plan still included our Lord's ascension into Heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church until Jesus returns on the Last Day. Jesus would remove His visible presence from this world, but that doesn't mean He would no longer be present in the world. As we'll see on Ascension, our Lord went to heaven not to get away from it all, but that He might fill all things. By His ascension into Heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is then able to remain with His Church at all times and places in a way He could not have had everything stayed the way it was after His Resurrection.

Jesus says to His disciples: "now I am going to Him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." For those who love each other, separation can be difficult. Whether it's a spouse going away for the weekend, kids going off to school, a TDY, a deployment, or a death, to be separated from those you love is a cause for grief. The disciples had been with our Lord for three years, sitting at His feet and learning from Him, sharing food and drink, good times and bad, suffering and joy. The Twelve Disciples were a band of brothers, tied together in a bond with Jesus. To

lose Him would mean to lose everything. Maybe they expected another 30 or 40 years working with our Lord, learning from Him and spreading His message throughout the land. Maybe they expected a restoration of the kingdom of Israel in their lifetime, where they could serve in our Lord's cabinet as His trusted advisors. And now Jesus is telling them it's time for Him to move on to His next duty station. Sorrow filled their hearts. The mourning and grief set in immediately.

“Nevertheless,” says Jesus, “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.” It is good for Jesus to remove Himself that He might send the “Helper,” as our translation puts it. The title here is “Paraclete,” which is sometimes rendered as “the Helper,” “the Comforter,” or even “the Advocate.” Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. The role of the Holy Spirit is to “help us in our weakness” by interceding for us before the Father with groanings too deep for words (Rom 8:26). He intercedes for the saints according to God's will (Rom 8:27) as an advocate, as one who speaks on our behalf since we are not able. The Holy Spirit teaches us what we need to say right when we need to say it (Luke 12:12), and He comforts us in all our afflictions (2 Cor 1). It is good for the disciples and for us that Jesus dies, rises, and ascends into Heaven so He can send us the Holy Spirit to bring all these things to remembrance, to give us faith.

Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete comes, He “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment,” that is, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its own sin of unbelief, which is the root of all sins. Whatever sins we commit, unbelief is at the core. The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, who ascends to the Father and stands before His throne as our righteousness. We no longer see Jesus because He is interceding for us before the Father. Yet Jesus also ascended that

He might fill all things, working in different ways to build up the body of Christ, the Church. And the Holy Spirit will convict the world of judgment because the ruler of this world, Satan, the accuser of God's people, is Himself brought to judgment in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. There is no longer room for Satan to accuse us because Jesus has taken our place by dying the death on the cross that we deserved. The punishment for our sin has already been paid by Jesus, leaving the Devil no room for argument.

How does the Holy Spirit convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment? Through the preaching of God's Word. Jesus continues: "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 of His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come." This passage has been misused throughout the history of the Church to excuse going above and beyond what Scripture tells us or to reinterpret the clear words of the Bible.

Sometimes the work of the Spirit has been found in the deliberations of the Church or popular opinion. It has been thought that if enough authorities in the church state something is true, then it's true. That's exactly what the Reformation movement sought to put a stop to. It's not the authority of the Church that determines what Christians believe. Only Scripture can establish an article of faith. Still today, it is often assumed that whatever most people believe to be true is true. Churches change their doctrine and practice based on the winds of popular opinion. In the end, the spirit of the age replaces the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit. But Jesus is not telling us here that the Holy Spirit will teach the Church something new, something that has not yet been revealed.

On the other hand, sometimes the work of the Spirit has been found in the insights of individuals. Many Christians believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to them individually on a regular basis, whether vocally or through impressions. Many are seeking the Spirit's direction in their life or advice on how to handle something. God is certainly directing our steps and guiding our paths, but to expect a direct answer from the LORD apart from the written word of God is to go beyond what God has promised us. Everything we need for life and salvation is contained in the Bible. Whatever we think or feel apart from the clear, written Word of God might very well be true, or it might not, but either way, it is uncertain compared to Scripture. Our certainty is in God's Word alone.

Jesus says to the disciples: "I still have many things to say to you," not "I still have many *other* things to say to you." The core of the message always remains the same. After His Resurrection, Jesus continued teaching the disciples. Their eyes were opened to understand especially how the Old Testament refers to Christ. It's not that Jesus was teaching anything new or something different. He was teaching what He had always taught and what God's Word in the Old Testament had always pointed to: that the Son of man would be handed over, crucified, buried, but then would rise again from the dead. The role of the Holy Spirit is not to teach the disciples new, secret knowledge, but to lead them ever deeper into the revealed Word of God. That's what the Holy Spirit does for us today as well. He doesn't teach us new, secret knowledge that's not already there in Scripture. No, the Holy Spirit leads us ever deeper into the revealed Word of God, opening our eyes to the meaning of Scripture. He reveals to us the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus, a wisdom that remains secret and hidden from the world, but which was decreed before the ages for our glory and revealed to us in time whenever God's Word is preached or contemplated (1 Cor 2:7).

The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to convict us of sin and righteousness and judgment, to show us our sin, and to show us the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who accomplished everything for our salvation and for the salvation of the world. That's the central message of Scripture that the Holy Spirit is always revealing to us. The Holy Spirit guides us further into this truth, and Jesus Himself is the Truth. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us in the words of the Bible. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak on His own. He speaks in God's Word what He hears from the Father and the Son: a message for the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, that all your sins are forgiven, wiped away in the blood of Jesus. In the Word of God, the Holy Spirit declares to you the things to come: the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Jesus says of the Holy Spirit: "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." God's plan for your salvation was determined by the Father in eternity, carried out by the Son in His death and resurrection 2,000 years ago, and given to you today in God's Word and in the Sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit. The entire Holy Trinity has been active in your salvation since before the foundation of the earth. The entire Holy Trinity is still active in carrying out that plan of salvation in your life right now, and He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word (2 Thess 2:16-17). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.