

CANTATE / THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: St. John 16:5-15

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Saint James writes, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the FATHER of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”* What is this gift if it is not the Gift of the HOLY SPIRIT? For if it were not for the HOLY SPIRIT none of us would be here this morning.

But of course, you already know this, for only moments ago I heard you confess the same. You said, *“I believe in the HOLY SPIRIT...”* and as good Lutherans, I am sure every one of you can tell me what this means. But for those who may be new to our fellowship, I will declaim what the rest of us surely already know. To confess faith in the HOLY SPIRIT is to:

...believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in JESUS CHRIST, my LORD, or come to Him; but the HOLY GHOST has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith;

even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with JESUS CHRIST in the one true faith;

in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers,

and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in CHRIST eternal life.

To which, as good Lutherans, we respond: *“This is most certainly true.”* (Martin Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed)

Of course, we could give the Readers’ Digest version of Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed by simply stating that the Holy Spirit makes us holy and our confession would be no less true. This is so, because the true work of the HOLY SPIRIT is that of sanctification, or more simply put, to set us apart and make us holy by bringing us to faith in JESUS CHRIST. Thus His Name, **“HOLY SPIRIT.”** For the HOLY SPIRIT is the One that makes us holy and keeps us in the *“one true faith”* in a blessed state of sanctification, or holiness.

You see, the real work of the HOLY SPIRIT is the revelation of the redemption our LORD JESUS CHRIST has won for us through His life, death, and resurrection. It is really that simple! The HOLY SPIRIT preaches CHRIST into us, and therefore, gives us the benefits of our LORD's saving work by preaching God's Word through our ears and into our hearts so that we are able to believe and be made holy. As it is written, and you have so often heard, *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."*

Therefore, without the preaching of the Gospel by the HOLY SPIRIT, you could know nothing about JESUS and what He has done for you. Without the preaching of the Gospel by the HOLY SPIRIT, you could not believe in CHRIST and therefore receive the benefits of His work. All JESUS' work would have been in vain and we would still be lost in our sins because His work would remain hidden from us and lost forever. Where the HOLY SPIRIT does not cause the Gospel to be preached and does not awaken the understanding of it in the heart, all is lost. (Luther)

To give us the treasures won for us by JESUS, God has caused His Word to be written down in the pages of Holy Scripture by His faithful prophets, apostles, and disciples, to be preached and taught to us by faithful men in the Office of the Holy Ministry and other servants in the Church, and administered to us in the blessed Sacraments which CHRIST Himself has ordained. These are the means, by which we are called, gathered, and enlightened. God's Holy Word and blessed Sacraments are vessels from which He dispenses faith to fill our cups to overflowing. These, and these *alone*, are the means by which we are made holy and kept in the one true faith. Therefore, being sanctified, being made holy, is nothing else than being brought to the LORD CHRIST in faith that we may receive the treasures of His blessed work to which we could not have come by our own reason or strength alone.

Let this, then, stand as a warning to you, for where CHRIST is not preached, there is no HOLY SPIRIT to create, call, and gather the Christian Church, apart from which no one can come to the LORD CHRIST. Where there is no HOLY SPIRIT, there is no CHRIST; there is no God, and therefore, no Christian Church.

The vehicles or marks of the true Christian Church, those things through which the HOLY SPIRIT works, are preaching, absolution, Baptism, and the LORD's Supper. Everything else in the Church is secondary at best or meaningless at worst.

In Baptism, sinners die with CHRIST and are buried with Him into judgment, that just as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the FATHER, they are also raised with Him to walk in newness of life—real and abundant life, everlasting life. It is there, in Baptism, where water and Word are poured over you, that you were given and received

the HOLY SPIRIT with all of His gifts: victory over death and devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, and the entire Gospel in CHRIST.

God makes Christians by water and Word, by way of gift, such that faith and life do not come by the ears of God being filled with *our* words of promise, for those words are untrue and at times even empty. Nor do faith and life come by any work or merit on our part. Faith and life come by hearing the Word and promises of God and believing them, for those Words and promises are most certainly true and unbreakable because God does not and cannot lie, and with Him *"...there is no variation or shadow of turning."*

How does the HOLY SPIRIT use the Word of God to create faith and life? He creates faith and life by convicting you concerning sin, because of your unbelief; convicting you of righteousness, because even the holiest of your good works are but filthy rags; convicting you of judgment because Satan has already been condemned. In all of this, the HOLY SPIRIT preaches the Word of God into the ears of the unbelieving and the half-believing so that they might receive the life and righteousness of CHRIST.

The HOLY SPIRIT preaches this Gospel into your ears: *JESUS CHRIST, true God, begotten of the FATHER in eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my [your] LORD. He has redeemed me, [you] a lost and condemned creature. He has purchased and freed me [you] from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death.* (Martin Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed)

The HOLY SPIRIT declares that it is by the Blood of CHRIST that you are made holy.

The HOLY SPIRIT tells you that your "goodness" will not get you into heaven. He tells you that you could never be "good" enough. He tells you that on your own, you cannot be "good" at all. But, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

JESUS tells us He came to seek and save the lost and the condemned of this world. He said, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."* This means that through the goodness and mercy of God the FATHER, for the sake of the suffering, death, and resurrection of God the SON, and through the work of the HOLY SPIRIT, you need not lift a finger to inherit eternal life. It is yours, as a free gift of God the FATHER, for the sake of God the SON, poured over you in the waters of Baptism; poured into you in the Sacrament of the Altar; and delivered into your ears by the preaching and work of God the HOLY SPIRIT.

Therefore the Church lives and has Her being by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. You did not walk the earth with our LORD JESUS, but *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* Therefore, if you wish to see JESUS, do not strain with your eyes to find Him; instead, listen with your ears. For as Saint Mary, the very Mother of God, received the Infant CHRIST into her womb by the preaching of the HOLY SPIRIT in her ear, so CHRIST dwells in the depth of your being by the work of the HOLY SPIRIT, who preaches JESUS into *your* ears.

The HOLY SPIRIT preaches JESUS CHRIST, and Him crucified, risen, and ascended to the right hand of God the FATHER. He holds JESUS before you so that you may look upon Him who died for you, with the eyes of faith. The HOLY SPIRIT brings JESUS to you in the Words of Holy Scripture read to you from this lectern, preached to you from this pulpit, and presented to you in His very Body and Blood upon this altar, and He tells you of His promised return to raise you from the dust of your grave.

He satisfies your hunger for righteousness as a bit of bread is placed upon your tongue with the words, *“Take, eat, the Body of CHRIST given for you.”* He satisfies your thirst for righteousness with the words, *“Take, drink, the Blood of CHRIST, shed for you.”* He speaks JESUS’ Words of comfort to you in Holy Absolution. He gives JESUS to you in your loneliness and isolation and despair. He reaches down to you with the right hand of God and pours the Waters of Holy Baptism over you in the Name of God, the FATHER, God the SON, and God the HOLY SPIRIT.

All this, and only this, is the work of the HOLY SPIRIT. He does not speak of Himself; *“He does not speak with His own authority.”* He speaks of only that which He hears, and He tells us of things to come. The speaking of the HOLY SPIRIT glorifies CHRIST so that you are made holy. The HOLY SPIRIT takes from what belongs to JESUS and declares it to you with the words, *“You are forgiven all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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