

CANTATE / THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: St. John 16:5-15

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

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

In speaking to His disciples about the coming of the HOLY SPIRIT, JESUS said, *“He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My FATHER and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”* But what does this mean?

The first thing to be learned from JESUS in this statement is that the world is blind and ignorant. You see, all those who are without the HOLY SPIRIT, however wise they may appear to be in worldly ways and worldly matters, are, before GOD, nothing more than fools and blind guides.

This is a truth that the world cannot bear and certainly does not like to hear. The world insists its reason is beyond criticism and above all question. It is Christianity, the world claims, that is reserved for weaklings and naïve fools. So it is, that the unbelieving world, as it has right from the very beginning, attacks and belittles CHRIST and His followers, looking down its nose with contempt and scorn at what it considers weak, deluded, misled, mindless, simpletons clinging to their Bibles and childish superstitions.

But what is that to us? The Word of CHRIST could not be made any simpler or clearer; the HOLY SPIRIT comes to convict the world because the world does not know what sin, righteousness, and judgment are. And this the world cannot know, for the world rejects the HOLY SPIRIT.

The world would say that sin, or what the world would rather call *“inappropriate behavior,”* (that is, if such behavior is recognized as *“inappropriate”* at all) is anything that deprives one of his or her individual right to the pursuit of happiness, however one might define such happiness. If one has not deprived another of this inalienable right, then one is considered to be a good man or woman worthy of our respect and adulation. They are judged by the world to be righteous.

Therefore, if one does not openly lie, cheat, or steal, if one does not murder (excluding, of course, abortion or euthanasia, which the world does not consider murder), if one does not openly commit adultery, if one does not openly abuse power and position, then one is considered innocent, or as we Christians would say, without sin.

Sadly, a variant of this belief has found its way into the Church. What do I mean? I mean that many so-called Christians would say that they have not transgressed GOD's Law because they can point to GOD's Commandments and say, *"I have no idols. I do not curse using the LORD'S Name. I attend worship every Sunday and holy day. I treat my parents with respect. I have not murdered. I have not committed adultery, stolen my neighbor's property, or taken it in any dishonest way. I do not lie or covet my neighbor's wife, children, property, or goods. Overall, I would say I am doing pretty well."*

Yet, GOD does not measure sin and righteousness as the world measures them, and GOD does not judge as the world judges. The Kingdom of GOD does not reside in outward signs and acts but reigns in the hearts of GOD's people. GOD's Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom, and therefore, rejects any idea that one may rely on His own merit and works.

What, then, must you rely on? Faith of course, but not just any faith—rather faith in CHRIST JESUS alone. For JESUS says that the HOLY SPIRIT will come to convict the world of sin because it does not believe in JESUS, and placing your faith in anyone or anything other than JESUS is unbelief. So too, is the adding of your works and merit to that of CHRIST. The sacrifice of JESUS must stand alone without your merit or your good works, for they are nothing more than filthy rags before GOD.

Certainly, keeping the Law of GOD is good, even expected of a Christian, for JESUS said, *"one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."* Even so, this is something we do not and cannot do. The world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh conspire against us making it impossible for us to keep GOD's Law. Our fleshly desires keep getting in the way. Those who might claim that they are keeping GOD's Law deceive themselves and the truth is not in them. It is somewhat like putting lipstick on a pig; no matter how cute, it is still a pig. Thus, they wear their works as does a clown or an actor wear makeup covering the man underneath, but the man and the sin are still there.

You see, there is a difference between piety and pietism.

Piety is the effect of the grace of GOD as it is lived out in the life of a Christian—what we *rightly* call good works. It is GOD's good and gracious gift.

Pietism, on the other hand, is an outward show for the purpose of impressing another with one's self-defined holiness and godliness. It is an outward appearance of things, done for the purpose that one may make a display before the eyes of other people and GOD, wearing their righteousness on their sleeve as it were.

Yet, no matter how wondrous or holy one may appear, in truth, they wear a thin façade, which is nothing more than sin dressed up as righteousness—it is, as I said, lipstick on a pig.

Therefore, one must know that the Word of GOD does not speak only of one's outward existence and appearance, but takes hold of one's heart to the very depths of one's soul. Only good works that proceed from faith in CHRIST are good; for **CHRIST alone** is good.

Therefore, only works that are sanctified by CHRIST's Blood are truly good works. Which is to say, it is not our works that are good but those of CHRIST as He works in and through us. He dwells in us that we may live in love toward GOD and our neighbor.

Accordingly, God does not judge one as to his or her outward appearance and actions, but according to what, or to whom, he or she clings for salvation, and for that, one must cling to CHRIST alone.

So, let us be rid of all thinking or talk which says, *"So and so is a good kid or a good person but church just is not their thing."* How could that be true if they are persistently ignoring the Words and the Sacraments of JESUS, which alone create and sustain true faith? In Hebrews 11 the HOLY SPIRIT informs us that without such faith, it is completely impossible to please GOD. Therefore, anything or anyone who does not please GOD cannot be good.

This is the chief sin of the world and all unbelievers. That is, the chief sin of the world and all unbelievers is that they do not believe in JESUS. *"For there is no other Name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* There is salvation in no other, and it is from this sin of unbelief which all other sins spring forth.

For this reason, the world is no longer punished and condemned on account of other sins, because in His death CHRIST blots them all out; therefore, for this sin alone, for the sin of unbelief, will one be eternally damned and condemned. This is the sin, the blasphemy, against the HOLY SPIRIT of which our LORD speaks in all three Synoptic Gospels. That one will not acknowledge or receive JESUS CHRIST is the cause of all eternal suffering, hellfire, and damnation. Therefore, JESUS says in this Gospel: *"He will convict the world of sin... because they do not believe in Me."*

The HOLY SPIRIT also comes to convict the world of righteousness and judgment. These two go hand-in-hand because the world has no righteousness of its own, and indeed, the world believes in no sin. Therefore, the world is judged because the world refuses to judge itself. Worse, it refuses to judge and condemn the prince of this world, who is Satan, but welcomes him with open arms and even chases after him. But he and his kingdom have already been judged and stand condemned.

The world and Satan are judged and condemned, and for that reason we suffer. For though the world refuses to judge itself and its prince, it has no problem judging CHRIST and persecuting His holy people. Still, this is but a little cross to carry when compared to the promised joys to come.

So now, listen to the HOLY SPIRIT, whom CHRIST and the FATHER have sent to you. For He has been sent to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify you with His gifts and keep you in the one true, holy, catholic, (that is universal) and apostolic faith. This is the work of the HOLY SPIRIT. God, the FATHER and SON, have sent Him to guide you into all truth.

But just what is that truth? That *“JESUS CHRIST, true GOD, begotten of the FATHER in eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, is [your] LORD. He has redeemed [you], a lost and condemned creature. He has purchased and freed [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.”* The HOLY SPIRIT declares it is by the Blood of CHRIST that you are saved and sanctified or made holy.

The HOLY SPIRIT tells you that your “goodness” will not get you into Heaven. He reveals to you that you could never be “good” enough. In fact, on your own, you do not even have the capacity to be “good.” But, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

You see, JESUS said He has come to seek and save the lost; all those without faith in Him and refuse to recognize Him as their Lord and Savior. *“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.”*

That is Good News for us. It is the Good News that through the goodness and mercy of the FATHER, for the sake of His suffering, dying, and rising SON, you need not lift a finger to inherit eternal life. It is yours as a free gift of the FATHER, for the sake of His SON, delivered into your ears by the preaching and work of the HOLY SPIRIT.

Thus, does the Church live, breathe, and have Her very being by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of GOD. The HOLY SPIRIT preaches JESUS CHRIST, and Him crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day risen from the grave to ascend to the right hand of His FATHER and ours as our SAVIOR and Advocate.

It is in this way, GOD, the HOLY SPIRIT, holds JESUS before your eyes, and in this way, He speaks CHRIST into your ears and heart, that by hearing, *“you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of GOD, and that believing you may have life in His Name”* that you may see Him and receive rich and abundant life in His Name.

That you may see Jesus with the eyes of faith the HOLY SPIRIT brings JESUS to you in the Words of Holy Scripture read from the lectern. He speaks JESUS to you in the words of the sermon preached from the pulpit. You see JESUS as through your pastor He places a bit of bread on your tongue and says, *“Take, eat, the Body of CHRIST, given for you.”* GOD satisfies your thirst for righteousness as through your pastor He pours JESUS’ Blood into your mouth saying, *“Take, drink, the Blood of CHRIST, shed for you.”* With the authority GOD gives to him through the Church, your pastor speaks JESUS’ Words of comfort to you in Holy Absolution.

GOD gives JESUS to you in your loneliness, your guilt, your isolation, and your fear. The HOLY SPIRIT reaches down to you and your children with His righteous right hand, marking you as one redeemed by JESUS CHRIST the CRUCIFIED as the Waters of Holy Baptism are poured over you in the Name of our Holy GOD, who sent Him.

This is the reason for the HOLY SPIRIT's coming. He proceeds from the FATHER and the SON with the authority to speak about our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. He does not speak of Himself; *"He does not speak with His own authority."* He speaks of only that which He hears from the FATHER and SON and tells you of things to come.

Thus, the speaking of the HOLY SPIRIT glorifies JESUS CHRIST alone. The HOLY SPIRIT takes of what belongs to JESUS and declares it to you saying, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

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

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida

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Adapted in part from a Cantate sermon preached by Dr. Martin Luther, of blessed memory, in Wittenberg, 1523 A✠D.