

“It is humbling...” John 15:26,27; 16:4b-15

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But 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. Nevertheless, 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.

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.

“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.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, or we could say, the birthday of the Christian Church. The day when the church received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Helper and Comforter. So, happy birthday to you! Yes, to you, for you are the church.

Today for our Gospel reading we have these verses from the gospel according John, where Jesus speaks about the sending of the Holy Spirit, and describes what the Holy Spirit will do for you.

I want to begin with reading Luther’s explanation of the third article of the Apostles’ Creed, that is, on the Holy Spirit. This is how the great Reformer summarized the most important things we need to know about the Holy Spirit.

“I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.”

Wonderful words. But how much more wonderful is the reality that is described in these words. So humbling and joyful at the same time. “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.”

You are here today. Some of you come from Christian families, some of you became Christians later in your life, but in either case, you didn't chose to believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord by your own understanding or strengths.

It is humbling to recognize that we are not here because we were smarter than the rest, thus being able to come to the knowledge of the truth. We did not have greater will power that enabled us to make the right choice. None of these.

“But instead the Holy Spirit has called you through the gospel, enlightened you with his gifts, made you holy and kept you in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.” Truly humbling...

To put it simple – you are here because of the Holy Spirit. You are a Christian, you have received all the wonderful promises of God, forgiveness of all your sins and eternal life in God's presence, not because you are such a special person, better than others, but because the Holy Spirit has such a special attitude towards you.

He gently called you through the Gospel, He persuaded that God is, indeed, gracious to you in Jesus Christ, that even as you are accountable before Him, you can trust Him as your loving Father in heaven.

He enlightened our dark hearts with His gifts, and only He keeps our faith. He does it daily. He does it abundantly. He does it undeservedly, and He will raise you and will give you eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Our faith without the Holy Spirit would be like life without breathing. It wouldn't exist. Therefore we have this one day, one day (!) per year to meditate upon what the Holy Spirit does for us.

Let's see what today's reading tells us about the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus left His disciples He promised that He will send us the Holy Spirit. That He will be with us and dwell within us. (John 14:17)

God kept His promise as always. Now all of you are, as the apostle Paul put it, the temple of the Holy Spirit, for God the Holy Spirit is with you and dwells in you.

It doesn't mean that we need to look for God inside of us, searching for Him in the depth of our hearts, as some tend to teach, it simply shows how intimately close the Holy Spirit is with you, gently changing your heart and leading you to Jesus.

When we reflect on today's text we can say that Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to replace Him. But there is more. This is much more intimate than we usually think. Whatever Jesus did, He did it together with the Holy Spirit, in the power of the Spirit. His conception, ministry, miracles, resurrection.

One of the most influential theologians Irenaeus said already in the second century, that the Word and the Spirit are like two hands of God. They always work together. With these two hands God the Father embraces you.

So, from our perspective it looks like after Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit took the place of Jesus. Now the Triune God is present with us in His Spirit. It is true and correct. But there is also another perspective, God's perspective.

It's different. When Jesus, the Son of God was among us, the Holy Spirit was with Him. When Jesus ascended to the Father, whom did He leave in His place? Yes, His disciples, His church, or we can say - you.

The church, that is, you, are the body of Christ on earth. That's how Jesus Himself spoke about it. When He appeared to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, as Paul was persecuting the church, Jesus asked: "Why do you persecute me?!"

That's why Paul speaks so often about the church as Christ's body. Now, when Jesus was here, the Holy Spirit was with Him. Now you are the body of Christ on earth. That's why the Holy Spirit is with you, as He was with Jesus.

If from our perspective Jesus sent the Holy Spirit instead of Himself, then from God's perspective, you stepped in the place of Jesus. You are His body. That's why you have received the same Spirit.

That's why you are made one with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. We are united in one, holy, Christian, apostolic church, it is reality already now. Sure, in this world we have many different Christian groups, and there are very good reasons to be separated for now.

But from God's perspective, all Christians make up one church universal, throughout the ages. One church with Adam and Eve, with Noah, with Moses, with David, Isaiah, apostles, Martin Luther, and so on.

We are here to continue the work of the Gospel, that is, to bring people "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Act 26:18) With all the gifts that are given to us.

For this task we have received the Spirit. As Jesus said: "He will bear witness about me." How will the Holy Spirit do it? Through you, through you. That's why Jesus said: "And you also will bear witness about me."

This is our task, to witness about what the Triune God has done in history for the sake of this world. That He has made the first step. He, against whom we rebelled and sin, has come and declared His forgiveness. Receive it, and you are reconciled with God, and it doesn't matter anymore what you have done, you are made new.

But then Jesus continues. The Holy Spirit "will convict the world concerning [three things] sin and righteousness and judgment." When the Holy Spirit speaks through us, He convicts the world concerning these.

What are they? How to understand them? *First*, sin – "because they do not believe in me." What does it mean? We can say that here Jesus points to the very essence of sin. Unbelief in God who has revealed Himself.

Unbelief in God, who became a man so that only we can clearly and without doubt understand His message. Jesus Christ, true God and true man came to reveal what the Father's attitude towards you is, that in spite of our sin, the Father loves you and desires not only to forgive you, but to give you a new, pure heart, a new life in His presence.

But our sin makes us to reject Jesus Christ. People better remain in their sins, separated from God, but having their imaginary freedom that they are like gods themselves. Miserable 'gods' who don't even know what is right or wrong.

This is what sin does. And when we share with people around us the good news about Jesus, our message convicts them of their sin... for they better remain in darkness, for their works and desires are evil.

Second, when we speak about Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts people concerning righteousness. What does this mean? We proclaim that we can be truly righteous before God only through Christ, that it is God's gift to you.

God sees our hearts and thoughts; whatever little good we do, it doesn't change what we carry inside. That's why God offers you this wonderful exchange – He gives you the righteousness of Jesus, while Jesus takes upon Himself the sin of the world, including all your sins.

But people don't want this. They want to be righteous by their own actions. To be in control. Of course, they can't be righteous according God's laws, therefore they chose their own criteria which make them feel righteous... at least in their own eyes, and then believe that God should accept them according their rules.

When we tell that Jesus came down, lived, suffered, died, rose again and went back to the Father, to show that He is the only way, and to give us His righteousness as gracious gift of God, we again convict the world. It shows how unwilling the world is to accept God's gracious care.

Third, the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning judgment. What does this mean? The world doesn't want to listen to God, when God speaks to it in His word making known His will for our lives.

When you tell people about Christ as the Lord, you convict them for they don't want to accept God's word as authority and guidelines for their lives and as the ultimate judge in all matters.

They want to make up their own mind. Be their own judges. They are under the spell of the ruler of this world: "Did God really say so?" 'Make up your own mind, you can be like gods, you can decide what is good and what is not.'

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, that is what He does, - He reveals the truth; about us, about the world, about sin, about God's judgement and grace. When people don't want to accept what He tells them, their rebellion against God's authority is clearly revealed.

Thus the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning these three – disbelieve in Christ, people's desire to justify themselves, and their unwillingness to submit to God's authority. The verdict is - guilty, guilty, guilty!

But the Spirit does it with one purpose –to call the world through the Gospel, to enlighten them with His gifts, to lead them into the one common, true faith and to bring them into God's Kingdom. The conviction comes first, so that people could come to the truth and would recognize the need for the Saviour.

Lastly Jesus said that the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all the truth." This is such a beautiful promise. Yes, we are fallen. Yes, we are broken. Yes, our sin has tainted all our abilities. We are only shadows of what our Creator intended us to be, and we have lost the wisdom that our Creator had bestowed to us.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is sent you to help you to understand the truth. This is what He does. He makes you wise. He takes God's word, which we have as the Bible, and He explains it to you.

He reveals you God's wisdom in creation, He reveals you God's design for your lives, He helps you to comprehend what is wrong with this world and how we can be cured. He makes even the simple wise.

I pray that the Holy Spirit continues His work with you, leading you closer to Jesus and the Father, making you wiser day by day and helping you to witness about your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.