

Come Down, O Love Divine
The Fourth Sunday After Easter
(From the Gospel: *St. John xvi: (5 ff:)*)

King James Version (KJV): *5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? 6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. 12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. 15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*

We are approaching the end of Eastertide, which in its forty day length is a mirror-reflection of the season of Lent we just passed through. The Book of Acts in its opening verses describes these days: *To [his apostles] he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God...* (1:3). Jesus is actively preparing them for His soon departure at the Ascension, and for the day of Pentecost which will follow shortly thereafter, when the Holy Spirit will be poured forth.

This process of preparation had been a long one, and His address to the apostles on the night of His arrest, of which today's Gospel is a portion, was also filled with intensive instruction. Its focus is the coming Spirit of God, who, when He arrives, will play two very distinct roles, one of them in the Church, and the other in the world. For the Church He is its power, its enabler, its Comforter, its authenticator. But for the world He is its source of conviction of sin, its ever-present reminder of the inevitability of divine judgment, the One who constantly works to keep its conscience informed of that which it instinctively seeks to avoid.

Is there evidence of these things? Think of how uniquely persistent the figure of Jesus Christ is in the reckoning of the world. Neither the passage of time nor the full force of every form of unbelief have succeeded in banishing the uncanny, incomprehensible influence of this Man's life and example, to this very day. There is no other historical figure that so preoccupies men, even seemingly against their wills. What is behind His almost inescapable presence?

Consider as well how very much alive Jesus is within the Church, His Body. We sing of Him, study Him, and partake of Him through the Sacraments. He is our delight and our passion, the very center and core of our lives, and yet He has been visibly absent from this earth for nearly two millennia. This, too, is living proof of the Spirit's work, who *glorifies Him* among those who love Him.

Jesus teaches that the Spirit will *reprove the world*. This idea of *reproving* has two meanings: making a clear statement of guilt, but also putting forth an earnest, strong, and convincing argument. Gospel proclamation will serve both to harden the hearts of the impenitent and also soften the hearts of those willing to accept it. The power of Gospel preaching will not be in oratorical skill, nor personality, nor persuasiveness, but in the presence and active agency of the Holy Spirit working through the medium of the preached Word upon the hearts and minds of the hearers (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4). This is far more than motivational speaking. This is a message whose delivery and reception are both supernaturally influenced.

There are three areas in which this reproof will operate: *sin, righteousness, and judgment*. *Of sin, because they believe not on me...* Jesus assures His disciples that the Spirit will, on behalf of the Son, continue to insist to the consciences of all men of all time, wherever the Gospel is preached, that this Jesus is the Son of God. Refusal to acknowledge this becomes more than a mere act of taste, or ignorance, or scholarly choice, or casual disregard. The Spirit will make sure that no man who has been supplied the witness of Christ through His followers can ever say that His conscience was not fully informed.

Jesus continues: ... [The Spirit will *reprove the world*] *of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more...* His work on earth was done. Not one iota of it was left uncompleted. The only unfinished business is that which He has graciously and kindly left to the Church of all ages to complete. His last words on the cross before He died were: *It is finished* (John 19:30). In the “high priestly prayer” which He will soon offer just before His passion, His words will include: *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*. No man on earth, no power nor cosmic force of any kind, ever controlled the agenda or timing of Jesus Christ. He appeared at will, and left at will. His birth and death were utterly outside of the agency of men.

His foes were convinced that they had gotten the best of Him. They mocked Him:

He saved others; himself he cannot save . If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (Matt. 27:42-43)

They were confident that they were vindicated by His miserable death, and that their own cause was consequently adjudged as righteous. They had no idea that their very actions had been predetermined by God for His own use, and that every facet of the enigmatic life of Christ — that life which they so despised and scorned— would ultimately be proven righteous, instead.

Lastly, the Spirit *reproves the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged*. St. John boldly declares in his epistle to the Church that *the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one* (1 Jn. 5:19). He is the unseen dictator of the wicked, using their lives at will, drawing them helplessly into his own destruction, from the greatest of them to the smallest.

But his sentence was passed upon the Cross. It only awaits the carrying out. Those who stubbornly align themselves with him will also share his fate.

How do these truths affect our mission here at St. Thomas? They provide for the whole Church a clear and tremendously encouraging picture of the dynamics of this invisible world of the Spirit in which we live. Without it, we would be in despair. To put it simply, our proclamation of the Gospel is never without the presence and partnership of God's Spirit. He has gone before us as we go forth, He is with us now, and He will be there, speaking to hearts, after we have departed. Whereas to the world He is the source of uncomfortable and unwelcome conviction, He is to the Church the Comforter. The Greek word is *Paraklete*, which can be translated "one who is called to another's side", a helper, an assistant.

This means that regardless of how many cultural doorways there are in our times through which God has been rudely ejected by wicked men, our Lord's influence will not be diminished. The faithful, ceaseless ministry of *the Spirit of truth* will tenaciously persist. He continues calling men out of darkness, and the Gospel message bears within itself all the necessary elements for its own success.

We need to take hold of the reality of what it means to be a spiritual people. It means that there is One among us, between us, surrounding us, within us, One who has supplied us with holy graces to demonstrate supernatural love and every other godly virtue in this desolate, dry wasteland of ever increasing rejection of God. We are not just half-empowered, or partially equipped, or minimally outfitted for the Gospel task at hand. It would only be our own blindness to, or ignorance of, the great gifts we possess that would limit us in fulfilling our missionary role.

When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. Truth. What a wonderful word. It is the measure of the actual state of things — what it really is — minus the beclouding effects of human opinion and of emotion, existing by itself with or without the approval and acceptance of men. It can neither be added to, nor taken away from, defying all change. It arises only from God, and is maintained alone by Him. It takes a clear mind, illuminated by the Spirit, to perceive it, and to express it to others.

How desperately men need the truth, awash as they are in a sea of relativism which cruelly deprives them of allegiance to anything trustworthy that they might seize upon for safety.

If we keep these things very much in mind, feed upon them, meditate on them, imbibe them, we will transform our own little worlds with the truth. They are the very thoughts we should be thinking, in order to replace the ones we shouldn't.

It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.