Sermon | Pentecost C

TEXT: John 14:23—31; Acts 2:1-21

15 May 2016

“The Holy Spirit: Advocate for our Conscience”

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Dear saints,

It is the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of the Holy Spirit. And right the start, we’ll ask this question: what is the Holy Spirit all about anyway? What’s his job? How does the Holy Spirit work in your life, and in mine, and in the Church? What is the Holy Spirit all about?

And the answer is simple: the Holy Spirit really has one task, and that is, **to bring you Jesus**. To come wherever the seed of his Word is planted in your ears, and to drive that Word down into your heart, to sow it up in your heart, so that it produces faith. So that, when you hear Christ’s Word, you believe him, you trust him, you have him as your Lord, you cast all of your hopes and dreams and fears and anxieties upon Jesus, because he loves you and is your Savior. **The Holy Spirit’s work is to bring you Jesus.**

And that’s what Jesus says in today’s Gospel. He’s telling his disciples Maundy Thursday night: when *the Holy Spirit* [comes], *whom the Father will send in my Name, he will…bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* In other words, what’ the Holy Spirit going to do? “He’s going to remind you, to remind you of my words, to remind you of my works, to remind you all the things I said and did, and to teach you to believe that it was all for you. He’s going to bring me to you.” That’s his work.

And then at Pentecost, we see that actually happening. Fifty days after Passover, the Apostles are gathered there in the Upper Room. The Holy Spirit comes. There’s a loud rushing wind, tongues of fire—now why tongues? I picture the Rolling Stones symbol—a tongue. Why tongues? Because he was going to cause them to preach, to preach the good news of what Christ has done by his death and resurrection to accomplish the salvation of the world. And when they started to preach, everyone heard in his own native tongue. You see, there were lots of foreigners gathered there for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, who, spoke many different tongues. Well it was a miracle of hearing. The Holy Spirit caused everyone to hear, no matter their tongue. And in so doing, brought Jesus to the nations. That was the story of Pentecost.

And what’s the result of all that? What’s the result when the Holy Spirit brings Jesus to you, when he causes you to hear his Word and receive it in faith? And the answer is *peace*. Peace of conscience. Jesus says again in the Gospel, “*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*.” That’s what the Spirit gives: peace, peace of heart, peace of conscience, no fear, no worry—peace. That’s what we’ll talk about today.

Those of you that were here last week will remember how I invited you to picture heaven as a courtroom. That, if heaven is a courtroom where God is Judge seated upon his throne, and all the nations are gathered before him for the judgment, the bad news is that there is one who stands against us, an accuser. And that one is Satan. Satan is like our prosecuting attorney in heaven. And his job, his role in God’s court, is to bring before God all our sins, all the ways that we’ve broken his laws, transgressed his commandments, and failed to do what he has called us to do. And then, to declare on the basis of God’s Law that we deserve to die and be eternally condemned. That’s Satan’s place in God’s court.

But the good news is this: if we have a prosecuting attorney in the court of God, we also have a defense attorney there, and that one is Jesus. So that Jesus, by his Ascension into heaven, has gone into the court of God to be our Advocate, to make our defense before the Father. And when Jesus makes our defense in the court of God, he doesn’t plead our works. He doesn’t stand before the Father and say, “Look Father, they’re not really as bad as Satan is making them out to be.” No. When Jesus makes our defense in the court of God he pleads his blood, which has answered for all sin. Imagine it: the accuser, the devil standing there with a long scroll. And on it, he has a list of all your sins. And Jesus walks up with his blood. And he pours his blood on that list. And now it’s covered. And the Father accepts that evidence on your behalf, so that in the court of God, you’re acquitted, forgiven. And now Satan has nothing left to say, nothing left to accuse you before the Father. And that’s how we’re justified, made right with God. Not by anything we have or haven’t done, but by Jesus, what he has done for us, and through faith, believing in him, that’s how we’re justified. So that our hope, our confidence is in Christ, and not in ourselves.

Well there’s a courtroom in heaven, but there’s another court on earth. And it’s right here—in each and every one of you—and it is the court of your conscience. What’s a conscience? Think of your conscience like a courtroom. It’s a place where judgments are made. On the one hand, our consciences have this warning function: they warn us what not to do. Don’t go 110 on the highway, you’ll get arrested. Don’t spend your paycheck at the Bass Pro Shops, you’ll go broke. Don’t forget your wife’s birthday, and go out with friends, you’ll be in the dog house. Kind of like the cartoons: the devil on one shoulder saying, “do it,” but the angel on the other, “don’t do it.” That’s our consciences, warning us what not to do.

But there’s another function of our conscience. And that is, when we have done wrong, our consciences accuse us. They say, “guilty.” On the one hand we can have a clean conscience, a conscience that is free of guilt. On the other hand we can have a guilty conscience, and that is a conscience that accuses us, a conscience that reminds us of what we’ve done wrong, a conscience that tells us again and again of our past failings, of our shortcomings, and of our sin. And dear saints, you know as well as I do, that there’s nothing more powerful in all the world than a guilty conscience. Guilty consciences can lead us into all sorts of destructive behavior. So many people fall into habits or addictions, chasing after things like drugs, alcohol, simply because they are running away from these powerful feelings of remorse and regret that a guilty conscience gives. A guilty conscience can literally destroy us.

And we have to understand Satan’s work in our conscience. Just as he is our accuser before God, so also is Satan our accuser in our conscience. We hear his voice there in the quiet of our minds and our hearts, reminding us of all the ways we’ve sinned, and done wrong. And this is what Satan’s work is all about. You know, sometimes I think we have the wrong idea about the devil. Sometimes we think the chief work of the devil is to tempt us into sin—to be sure, this is what he does. And he has all kinds of tricks to get to you sin. He’ll tell you, “Don’t worry, nobody will get hurt. Nobody will know about it.” Or, this is worse, “Don’t worry. God will forgive you.” He works hard to tempt us to sin. But his greatest work, his chief work, is to accuse us of sin. To brings the sins we’ve done into our consciences to accuse us. And he does that to attack our faith, so that we begin to doubt the Lord’s promises, that they’re really for us; so that we begin to despair of the grace of God, the love of God, the mercy of God for us, to get us to think thoughts like, “Maybe I’m not really a Christian. Maybe I’m not really forgiven,” things like that. Because at the end of the day, the only thing that can condemn us is unbelief. And so Satan attacks our faith.

But here’s the good news: just as you have an Advocate in the court of God, our Lord Jesus, who pleads for you, who defends your cause before your Father and pleads his blood for your forgiveness; so now you also have an Advocate in the court of your conscience, and that is the Holy Spirit. Remember what we said is the Holy Spirit’s work? **To bring you Jesus.** Jesus said, *He will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* And this is what he does for you. When Satan attacks you, when he reminds you of your sin, guilt, shame, when he brings to your remembrance all the things you’ve done and haven’t done which have offended against God’s Law, then comes the Holy Spirit, by the Word of the Gospel. And he testifies in your conscience Jesus—the words of Jesus, the works of Jesus, all that Jesus said and did, for you. So that the devil says, “Look, your sin.” And the Holy Spirit says, “Look, the blood of Jesus.” The devil says, “Look, your guilt.” And the Holy Spirit says, “Look, the blood of Jesus.” The devil says, “Look, the wrath you deserve.” And the Holy Spirit says, “Look, the blood of Jesus, the cross of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the righteousness of Jesus, the promise of the Gospel.”

And here, we see the work of the Holy Spirit. We see the work of the Holy Spirit getting done in your life. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to give you the gift of a clean conscience, a conscience that, on the one hand, knows its sin, but on the other hand, knows its Savior. A conscience that, on the one hand, knows it’s guilt, but on the other hand, knows it has been washed of its guilt and shame in the holy, precious blood. And the result—the result of the Spirit getting his work done in your life—the result of that, is peace. Peace of heart. Peace of conscience. Peace of knowing, “I am a child of God. I am reconciled to the Father. I am forgiven in the blood of my Savior.” And by the Word of Jesus, by the Body and Blood of Jesus, which you receive this day, that peace is yours now, and forever.

Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**