

Exaudi (John 15:26-16:4; 1 Peter 4:7-11)

The Holy Spirit makes God's words your words. He takes the Word of God and puts it in your ears, your heart, your mind, and your mouth. Through the good news of Jesus Christ, he gives you a new life so that you listen, think, and talk like a Christian. This is why Jesus calls him the Comforter. He comforts you by declaring to you the truth of the Scriptures. He makes these words of the Bible familiar to you so that you not only know them and recognize them, but you also speak them. This is why St. Peter says, "If you speak, say what God says." Let his words be on your tongue.

Many people get this completely backwards. They treat the Holy Spirit as if he makes our words God's words. They figure that whatever they think and say must be how God thinks and speaks. They don't like the idea that God would punish sinners. Or at least they don't like that their favorite sins are condemned. So they assume that God must agree with them. They treat the Holy Spirit like some force that affirms them in how they already think, act, and talk. He's there to make them feel good. After all, isn't this what comfort is?

But the Holy Spirit doesn't comfort by appealing to what we already think and say. Our hearts are, by nature, deceitful. He is the Spirit of truth. He doesn't proceed from our own thoughts and feelings. He proceeds from the Father. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, sends him. He bears witness to what Jesus has done. He speaks the truth about Jesus. He speaks of Christ's perfect life, his innocent death in the place of all sinners, his victorious resurrection, and his ascension to the right hand of the Father. He gives us the assurance that Christ, who died for our sins, continues to plead for us in heaven. He gives us this confidence – this comfort – only through the words Christ has given him to speak. He speaks through the Scriptures, which all bear witness to Christ. He places these words in our ears and hearts. He replaces our sinful thoughts and conversations with a true faith and confession of our Lord.

Jesus tells his disciples, "When the Comforter comes, whom I'll send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he'll tell the truth about me." And then he goes on to say, "And you, too, tell the truth, because you've been with me from the beginning." Here Jesus isn't speaking of a mere private conversation. No, he's talking about a public witness or testament like what you would give before a court. The witness takes the stand and promises to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Jesus tells his disciples who were with him from the beginning of his earthly ministry that they will be put on trial. They will be thrown out of the synagogues and even put to death. They would be dragged before counsels, governors, and kings. In those moments, they would bear witness. They would give their testimony to the truth.

But Jesus gives them this assurance. He says that the Holy Spirit himself will bear witness. When Jesus calls him the Comforter, he is describing him as an advocate like you would have in court. When they are dragged before the rulers of this world to bear witness to the truth, to give their testimony that Jesus is God's own Son, that he was crucified, that he did rise from the dead, and that he did ascend into heaven, Jesus promises them that the Holy Spirit will be there as their Advocate. He will bear witness through them. His witness will be their witness. The truth he tells will be the truth they tell. The disciples would all be scattered and fall into doubt and terror when Jesus was crucified. But here Jesus comforts them and assures them that when the time comes for them to bear witness, they will not fall. The Holy Spirit would keep them faithful.

This is exactly what the Holy Spirit did. He inspired the apostles to speak the truth. He made his words their words. The very words written down for us are breathed out by the Holy Spirit. They are the very words of truth, the sure testimony of Christ our Savior.

And still today, the Holy Spirit works through these words of truth. Through these same words, which he gave to his apostles, he enlightens our hearts and minds. He gives us faith to trust in God's promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He puts these words in our hearts and makes them our own. He gives us a good conscience so that we don't need to be afraid to confess the truth even if we are dragged before courts. We don't need to tremble, because the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. He is our Advocate.

Lots of religious folks like to give testimonials. They tell the story of how God saved them or impacted their lives in some way. Now, personal stories can be helpful to encourage other Christians, but they can also turn into an excuse for someone to talk about himself. A true Christian witness isn't a testimony about your own experience. You weren't there when they crucified our Lord. But the apostles were. They witnessed Jesus die, and they witnessed him risen from the dead. They witnessed him ascend into heaven. The Holy Spirit gives their witness to us. In your baptism, the witness of Christ's death and resurrection becomes your own. And in his body and blood Jesus gives you his own testament that your sins are forgiven and that you have peace with God. This is the witness of the Spirit of truth. He gives you these very words to comfort you, to protect you, to strengthen and preserve you in the truth faith to life everlasting. So we bear witness by confessing the words the Holy Spirit has given us. When we defend the biblical teaching of marriage in this increasingly perverted culture, we testify of Christ the faithful Bridegroom who cleanses his bride, the church, from all sin and shame. When we speak against the evil of abortion, we testify of Christ who suffered death to give us life. When we refuse to participate in shallow spiritual movements that mix all religions together into one, we bear witness to the name of Christ as the only name by which we can be saved. We confess Christ in a world that denies Christ. And the Holy Spirit, who has given us the words to confess, will remain with us to help us, comfort us, and advocate for us in the face of every trial. We confess Christ before the world with the assurance that he will confess us. Jesus is coming. The end of all things is very near. It is in view of this that we bear witness to his gospel. And through the words of Scripture, the Holy Spirit prepares us for Christ's return. He keeps us sober minded. He helps us pray with confidence. He causes us to love one another. He teaches us to bear with the weaknesses and shortcomings of our fellow Christians with the knowledge that love covers a multitude of sins.

God gives his Christians different duties and various gifts. Each member of the body supports one another according to the abilities God gives. As St. Peter says, "Serve one another, each with the gift he received, as good stewards of the various gifts of God." Not all of us are as articulate. Not all of us are as handy. Not all of us are as organized. But God gives these abilities to support the whole body and glorify the name of his Son Jesus Christ. And he has given us all the same Word. We have the same creed, the same confession, the same certainly of our salvation in the testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. So let his Word dwell in you richly. If you speak let his words be on your tongue.

Because God has given these words to you. The Holy Spirit has made them your own. Some of your fellow Christians may be better versed in these words than you are. But don't be discouraged by that. Be strengthened. Let it encourage you to learn more. Take up a book from the Bible and read it (or listen to it) every day. Make it your own. Because the Holy Spirit has

already given this Word to you. He promises to strengthen you both to believe and to confess the words of eternal life. Amen.