

Cantate Sunday (John 16:5-15):

The Holy Spirit does not come from himself. He doesn't communicate with you in a special, unique way only you and him can understand. The Holy Spirit speaks what he hears from Jesus. He takes what belongs to Christ and declares it to us through the teaching of his apostles. And when he takes what belongs to Christ, he is taking everything. Jesus says, "Everything the Father has is mine." His kingdom, his righteousness, his glory – this is what the Holy Spirit gives us. He gives it to us by his Word.

It's hard to believe, isn't it? Just by his spoken Word, the Holy Spirit gives us everything God possesses. By these words, put into the mouths of sinful men, able to be expressed by a little child, recorded and proclaimed for us from the Bible – by these words the Holy Spirit speaks. And when he speak, he comforts. Jesus calls him the Comforter. And this is no fleeting, worldly comfort. It isn't comfort you get from eating familiar food or hearing a familiar tune. It is the new song of the Spirit who speaks the living words of God into your ears. It is objective comfort. Isaiah vividly describes it in his Song of Salvation to God in our Old Testament lesson (Isa 12): "I will praise You, LORD. Although you were angry with me, Your anger has been turned away, and You comfort me." Such comfort is something established already in the merciful work of Christ whose blood turned away God's wrath.

If you're going to learn any Greek word, I would recommend that one of the words you learn is Parakletos. Usually we just pronounce it Paraklete. This is the word our Bible translates as Comforter, Helper, or Advocate. Paraklete literally means to be next to you and call you. The Holy Spirit is our Paraklete. He encourages us in our weakness, calling us to faith with his gospel, and remaining with us in his gospel and sacraments.

Jesus is also called our Paraklete. In 1 John 2:1, we read, "If anyone does sin, we have a Paraklete with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One." Jesus is our Advocate. He is our Comforter. He is our Paraklete who calls us and remains with us. But how is Jesus our Comforter? How is Jesus our Advocate? How is Jesus our Paraklete? St. John explains in the next verse: "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world."

Here is another word you should learn. Propitiation. Our Bible translation has "payment" or "atoning sacrifice." Let's unpack this a bit. Jesus is the payment for our sins. He is the sacrifice by which the Father has been reconciled to sinners. To propitiate someone means to turn someone's wrath away. When my infant son with a new set of teeth bites my finger, it irritates me. But when I see him immediately smile at me, I am propitiated. My anger fades away. Jesus turned God's righteous anger away from sinners. This is how he is our Comforter. This is how he is our Advocate. This is how he is our Paraclete. He is our Paraclete with the Father. That is to say, he stands next to the Father, pleading for us, interceding for us, and defending us. His pierced side, hands, and feet, his innocent blood and perfect righteousness continues to avail before God as peace and favor for us. Any attack the devil, the world, or our own sinful nature brings against us, Jesus objects to it with his own innocence. And God always accepts Jesus' objections. God always listens to his Son. Everything the Father has belongs to the Son. So if Jesus is our Advocate, then we can be certain of how we stand before God.

Jesus is our Paraclete before the Father. The Holy Spirit is our Paraclete before our conscience. Jesus guarantees that we stand righteous and at peace with God, forgiven of all our sins and justified in his sight. The Holy Spirit guarantees that we do not lose faith in this righteousness and peace of our Savior. He guarantees that we can have a good conscience and remain at peace even when we must face the threats of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. He keeps our hearts believing and trusting in what Jesus won for us. He comforts us in our afflictions, helps us out of temptation, and strengthens us to confess the very words of truth he teaches us. And he does this all by declaring to us exactly what Jesus won for us and keeps secured for us on his heavenly throne.

It was good for us that Jesus went away. It was good for us that he suffered and died. It was good for us that he was raised from the dead. It was good for us that he ascended into heaven. Of course, we know this. If Jesus didn't die for us then we would still be under God's condemnation. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then our

faith would be in vain, and we would still be in our sins. If Jesus didn't ascend for us, then we would have no certainty that we stand righteous and at peace before the Father. In other words, as Jesus says, if he did not go away then the Comforter would not come to us. You see, it is the Holy Spirit who delivers all of this to us. He delivers to us everything Jesus went away to accomplish.

Jesus sums up the Holy Spirit's comfort and advocacy in three basic works. He convicts the world of sin. He convicts the world of righteousness. And he convicts the world of judgment. He convicts the world of sin, because the world does not believe in Jesus. Here the Holy Spirit teaches us what sin is. Sin is unbelief. There are all sorts of sins, which are evident throughout this world and in our own lives. But sin itself is much more than just breaking outward rules and codes of conduct. Sin is not believing in Jesus. Sin is not fearing, loving, and trusting in the Lord. And everyone has this sin. Everyone has his unbelief. Jesus does not say that the Holy Spirit convicts adults of sin. He doesn't say that he convicts those who reached a certain age of discernment of sin. No, he says that he convicts the world of sin. The whole world is guilty of not believing in Jesus. This unbelief is a deep, dark, mysterious hostility against God and his only begotten Son. And only the Holy Spirit can expose it for what it truly is. It is the cause of all the terrible things that happen in this world. And as long as you live in your sinful flesh, your natural desires are incapable of believing. Your natural desires continue to sin, not just by breaking rules, but by rejecting Christ himself.

We need the Holy Spirit to convict us of this so that we would die to ourselves every day, not rely on our own merits, and find comfort outside of ourselves in what only the Spirit of Christ can give us.

This is why the Holy Spirit convicts the world also of righteousness. As surely as the whole world is declared to be a sinner, the whole world is declared righteous because of what Jesus has done. He has gone to the Father, and you don't see him anymore. The fact that Jesus has gone to the Father is a reference to his obedient suffering and death in our place. He fulfilled the law his Father sent him to fulfill on behalf of all sinners. And he returned to the Father having accomplished peace for all people and victory over sin, death, and the devil. We hold onto this righteousness as a righteousness outside of ourselves, sitting at the right hand of the Father, advocating and pleading for us in perfect innocence and splendor. The fact that you don't see Jesus anymore is a reference to how we receive and possess this righteousness. We walk by faith and not by sight. We receive the righteousness of Jesus when we believe that our sins are forgiven and we are accepted into God's favor for Christ's sake. This is what the Holy Spirit delivers to us and to all people as a free gift in his precious gospel promise.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. The devil, whose deceitful tactics captivate the hearts and minds of this dying age, has been defeated. He who led us into sin and then accuses us for being sinners is now silenced forever. This is the judgment the Holy Spirit declares.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of these things – sin, righteousness, and judgment. He convicts. Another way of saying this is that he convinces. He proves it to be true. He reveals in his gospel what no one will be able to deny when Christ returns in judgment. Those who don't believe only remain in their sin, because they are calling God a liar, and they stay under the power of the devil. But the Holy Spirit continues to speak what he hears from the Son. He continues to glorify Jesus, taking what is his and declaring it to poor sinful creatures. He continues to call us, not from far off, but close at hand, in these seemingly simple and easily ignored words of Scripture.

And he is successful in his work. Sure, it may not seem like he is. When we consider how many people reject the counsel of the Holy Spirit, it may look as if his power is limited. When we consider how poor his Christians are, it can be hard to believe that everything the Father possesses has been given to us. When we consider how much joy and comfort we take in the things of this world, it's difficult to believe the comfort and peace that surpasses all of these things. How can this brief meal from this altar do such great things? How can baptism do such great things? How can the words of absolution do such great things? How can the instruction in the Bible do such great things? How can the Spirit give us such great comfort? We can be certain in the Holy Spirit's work, because he does not glorify himself. He doesn't work from himself. He isn't here just to give us good vibes. No, he remains

the good Counselor and Comforter and Advocate – he remains the Spirit of truth and Paraclete – because he delivers to us nothing less than what Jesus Christ, our Righteousness, Advocate, and Atonement has secured for us by his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension.

While Jesus remains our Advocate and Comfort before the Father, the Holy Spirit delivers it all to us through his Word. He is with us through our trials. He is keeping our faith alive when we must fight against our sins. He is teaching us to repent even as he teaches us to believe. And he is always pressing us forward to our living hope in the coming of our Savior. As surely as you have been convicted and convinced by the words of the Spirit, you can know that you have already passed through judgment into life with Christ. As surely as he is risen from the dead, you can be certain that his Spirit will give life to your dying body.

There is no variation or shifting shadow in God. God cannot be broken apart. The Holy Spirit therefore doesn't hold out on you. Everything the Father has belongs to the Son, and the Holy Spirit delivers it all to you through his Word and sacraments. It's impossible for your sinful flesh to believe such an amazingly comforting truth. It's too much for our feeble minds to bear. But the Holy Spirit gives you the conviction of God. And as surely as Christ has gone to the Father, his words of comfort you have today are true and enduring. To him be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.