

May 1–2, 2010
Cantate
John 16:5-15
“Convictions of the Spirit”

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Holy Spirit does three things. **He convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.** There is nothing here about speaking in tongues, performing miracles, or seeing the future. The Spirit has given those gifts, at times, to men. But here Our Lord speaks of why He sends the Spirit and of what the Spirit always does. The Son sends the Spirit to take what is His and declare it to you. He does not speak of His own authority. But He takes what is the Father’s and the Son’s and declares it to you. When He has done other things, miracles and such, it was to underscore or serve this gift. For by this declaration, what is the Son’s is now yours, the Holy Spirit guides you into Jesus, into Truth.

The Spirit convicts you of sin. Because you do not believe in Jesus. He convicts you of righteousness. Because Jesus has gone to the Father for you. And He convicts you of judgment. Because the devil has been judged, and removed from the bench, so that you go free. This is still the work of the Spirit today. This is the message of the Church.

You are a sinner. You commit sins because you do not believe in Jesus. You do not trust Him. You think He is holding out on you, that He doesn’t care about what you want or need, that He is not providing what it takes to make you happy, and so forth. So you take it for yourself. If you believed in Him you would not sin. You would wait for Him to give you what you want. You would trust that He knows best and cares for you. But you do not. You think you are smarter than Jesus, nicer than Jesus, even that you love yourself more than Jesus loves you. That is why you sin. But your sin never works the way you thought it would, because Jesus does in fact love you.

The Law of the Lord isn't just arbitrary rules for you to follow, meant to break you or teach who is boss, like making boot camp enlistees scrub the toilets with tooth brushes. Think of gossip. *Why is it forbidden?* Because no good comes of it, because it hurts not only those you talk about, but it also hurts you and those you tell. *How many times have you gossiped and then regretted it? When have you have restrained yourself, not said something evil, told the truth, spoke well of other people, even your enemies, and then regretted it?* Never. The Law is good. It shows us what is good. It shows us the best way to live, what we were made for, how life is the most satisfying. But you have broken it. You have failed. You have acted foolishly, selfishly. You have hurt people. You have dishonored God. You have not believed that Jesus was good, that He loves you. You are a sinner. Repent.

That is the first conviction. But that is not all the Holy Spirit has to say. He also convicts of righteousness. Because Jesus has gone to the Father. You are righteous. Jesus has come to the earth and taken up your flesh, made Himself a sacrifice for sin, defeated death, Hell, and the devil, and then gone to heaven, to the Father, as a Man, for you. He has opened heaven to all believers. You are righteous because Jesus has paid your debt and gone to present your case to His Father, because Jesus loves you. Yes, you are a sinner. But He came for sinners. He died for your sins. The conviction that we are sinners is not bad or evil in the least. Indeed, it drives us to the Gospel. If we are sinners, then we have a Savior. The point is this: you are righteous in Christ. Jesus is your Mediator, your High Priest, and your Advocate. He points to the marks on His hands and feet as payment in full. Justice has been satisfied. The Law has no accusations left. You are righteous. The devil is defeated. He cannot have you. You belong to Jesus.

This is what the Spirit takes from Jesus and declares to be yours. The Lord makes a great exchange. He takes your sin, guilt, shame, and mortality. And in exchange for them, by the Spirit's declaration, He gives you what is His: His righteousness, innocences, holiness, blessedness, perfection, love, grace, the

service of angels, the Name of His Father, access to heaven, and so forth. He takes what is yours. He gives you what is His. It is not a fair exchange. It is mercy. It is the way of the Lord. It is what “**the meek shall inherit the earth**” is talking about. And by it, you are righteous. The Spirit seeks to convict you of this, that is, convince you, that for Jesus’ sake, at Jesus’ Word, you are righteous, the beloved of the Father.

Consider this. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, of necessity and for our good. But imagine if He stopped there, if He only preached the Law. *Who would be pleased?* The devil. If the devil had his way, we would not only put the ten commandments onto the walls of our court rooms, but raise monuments in our living rooms, classrooms, and bedrooms, in our libraries and bars, casinos and brothels, bus stations and grocery stores. We would never escape from the Law. All we would know is the first conviction: you are a sinner.

The Law is good but the devil loves it. *Why?* Because it is one of his chief allies, a fellow prosecuting attorney. The Law always accuses. So does the devil. *Remember the temptation of Our Lord?* The devil uses the Word of God for his purpose, which is always the same, to accuse, condemn and kill. But thanks be to God, the Spirit has more of the Word than that! What the devil despises is not the Word of God but the proper use of God’s Word, the distinction and application of Law and Gospel.

The Spirit convicts. You are a sinner. But there is more. The devil would not only stop there, but he would twist it. For his method is to always show us but one side of Christ. He preaches the Law as though you can do it, obtain the good, and avoid the bad, in the commandments by “**giving it all you’ve got.**” He says, “**See. The Holy Spirit and I agree. You are a sinner. Now you need to just try harder.**” By this he would either lead you to despair, because no matter how hard you try you would not make it, or he would lead you to the delusion of self-righteousness and teach you to compare yourself to others.

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, but differently than the devil. He does not hold the Law as a promise to be obtained or a goal to be reached. It is simply a statement of fact: You are a sinner. You do not believe in Jesus. You deserve damnation. But the Spirit continues. He uses the Law in mercy in order to expose you and convict you, but this is to prepare you for the Gospel.

So the Spirit convicts. You are judged. You make your confession. You say, **“I am a sinner. I am guilty.”** But you also say, **“I am baptized. Jesus has claimed me. I wait on Him. He declares me righteous. The Lord will fulfill His Word.”** The Spirit’s conviction always leads to Jesus.

Then the evidence is presented. The court is shown the perfect life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. The gavel comes down. You confessed guilt, but Jesus showed His sacrifice. The pronouncement is made: **“You are innocent. You are righteous.”** And that is the judgment of heaven. You are like Barabbas. You go free. Jesus takes your place. So also, the devil is judged. He brought false accusations against you. You have no sins. You are forgiven, as clean as the new fallen snow. You are righteous, a saint of the Most High. The devil slandered you. He tormented you. He tempted you. He is a liar. He is judged and condemned because of it. He cannot do this to you, a prince of heaven, the bride of Christ, the beloved of the Father. The Father is well-pleased with you. You are righteous. The devil is chained in Hell forever. His power was always an illusion, now it is gone. He has nothing left. He is judged, and there is no one left to accuse you. You are judged: innocent.

The Holy Spirit does three things. He convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Thanks be God. He does them all in mercy and He does them all for us.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.