

**The Comforter; The Reprover**  
*The Fourth Sunday After Easter*  
(From the Gospel: *St. John xvi: (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.*

**New International Version (NIV):** *5 Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. 7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.*

Jesus' monologue to His disciples as recorded in John chapters 13-17 is unique in the Gospel narratives. It is teaching that is very specific to the disciples as His closest and most intimate students. To them He will bequeath the ministry that He had inaugurated during His earthly life. He is about to accomplish the most critical phase of His work, one which He alone can perform: dying for the sins of the world, and rising three days afterward to grant eternal life to all who believe. In a few short weeks He will then depart from His friends completely, not to be seen until His Second Coming on an indeterminate day.

His words to them are of critical importance. They are intended both to impart hope and faith, and also give specific instructions to those who will found the future Church. Never before nor afterward have men been so seriously and earnestly counseled.

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, is here discussed in detailed terms for the first time. Christ assures His worried and struggling disciples that the Holy Spirit will provide them with every necessary grace in His absence. But in today's Gospel, the focus is less on the ministry of the Spirit in the lives of believers, as it is on His mission to the world at large.

The text informs them exactly how the Spirit will work in the world as a consequence of their preaching the Gospel. With this explanation offered in advance, they will understand the varied reactions they will immediately encounter upon the church's coming inauguration at Pentecost.

Jesus clearly states that the Spirit will operate in three distinct ways in the *world*. It is important to understand the concept of the *world* as the New Testament uses it. The *world* is the exact opposite of the Kingdom of God. There is no common ground between them. They are at war. The *world* is ruled ruthlessly and desperately by the *prince of this world* (John 14:30, Eph. 2:1-2), whose willing, but unwitting subjects are all men who reject God and live in pride and self-love. Its goal is self-perpetuation and the glory of man. It would have continued on in blissful ignorance of its real state, comfortable in the deception that there were no threats to its existence, had Christ not appeared on the scene. But His arrival --His life, message, miracles, and finally... His death and resurrection-- were the beginning of its utter undoing. It was as if God had taken His place in His seat as Judge of the Universe, had summoned the world to court, and ordered it to stand before Him. He issued the judgment of guilty and pronounced the sentence, declaring that its execution was imminent. But at the same moment the Judge also presented Himself as the Savior and Redeemer of the very ones on whom the awful condemnation had been pronounced.

The Spirit, Jesus teaches, will *reprove the world* [NIV: *convict the world of guilt regarding...*] This idea of *reprove* has two meanings: making a clear statement of guilt, but also making 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*.

Jesus elaborates: *of sin, because they believe not on me*. In other words, having seen His miracles, heard His words, listened to personal testimony from others surrounding Him, being familiar with the circumstances of His birth, knowing the testimony of all of Scripture of which His life was the perfect fulfillment, supplied with incontrovertible evidence of His divinity on all fronts, the world still will not believe on Him. 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, as it were, 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.

This word *righteous* is among the most powerful and resolute of words, because it speaks of something supremely beyond all things human. It is way beyond mere propriety, or virtue, or honorableness, or the very best and most noble that characterizes man. It is “right”, because God Himself is right. It is better than the Law itself, because it is the essence of the One who is the Law’s Author. In leaving the world and returning to the Father, Jesus declares that when it comes to standards of righteousness, the world is beholden to Him, not the other way around. Though the world accounted Him a failure, and those who hated Him deceived both themselves and others that He had indeed been shamefully and rightfully executed and His mission completely ruined, the Lord had used all of this to His own ends. He is righteous. He has *overcome the world* (John 16:33), and will soon ascend victoriously to the Father.

Lastly, Christ states that [The Spirit will *reprove the world*] *of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.* We must never underestimate either the magnificence of man, or the power and ill-will of the devil. During Christ’s temptation at the beginning of His ministry, we see how closely the two are linked:

*And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. (Luke 4:5, 6)*

...*all the kingdoms of the world:* the great civilizations of the past, their conquests, the evidences of their industry and ingenuity which exist until this day; the nations and lands of our own time, the cities, the centers of learning, the technological achievements... all of this did the devil show to Jesus *in a moment of time*, like some supernatural, cosmic big-screen video display with images flickering across it in microsecond intervals. But Jesus did not desire to possess the world on the devil’s terms. Nor had He any interest in its *glory*. Except for the repentant, its end will be judgment. Christ overcame the devil through His death and resurrection (Col. 2:14, Heb. 2:14). Since the devil is the world’s master, his verdict is fully shared by his subjects.

Never before had a band of men been given such a message, promised the constant aid and assistance of an invisible Companion as they preached, and forewarned of such extraordinary results to their proclamation! No human heart, once confronted by the Gospel, because of the promised role of the Holy Spirit, could ever remain neutral. The result must either be judgment, or repentance. It is exactly the same mission that has always remained within the province of the church, and continues so today.

*Conviction of guilt* has generally never been welcomed by human hearts. The results of Christ's own preaching ministry, and that of the Church documented in the Book of Acts, as well as examples throughout history bear this out. People will do almost anything other than face the consequences of their sinful actions, and what they imply. Only a faithful, good hearted remnant will respond and sincerely repent. Could the very level and number of distractions around us be evidence of this? Every nose is in a screen or a phone. Every ear is stopped with headphones. Every click of the clock is taken up with some time-wasting activity. Talking heads everywhere and anywhere chatter on endlessly around the clock with unending blather. The only extended silences are punctuated by snores during the night hours of when all are asleep. The task of the preacher has become harder still.

But to those who want to hear the Holy Spirit speak, once they have clearly heard Him, they will never be satisfied with anything else. He who convicts the world of guilt is also the One who comforts the believer. How wonderful!

Let us pray:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, we thank thee that thou hast ascended to the Father, in order that the Holy Comforter might descend upon the Church. He grants us not only the assurance, hope, and solace that we need in this world of such hostility to thee, but also the power and strength to preach the Gospel. Through our testimony he both warns men of judgment, and also draws them to Christ. Grant that we may be ever mindful of his presence, and faithful to our commission. Through thine own holy name we pray. Amen.*

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