

The Fifth Sunday of Easter  
St. John 16:12-22

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me, because I am going to the Father...Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy."

It's been four weeks since Easter Sunday. Given the frail state of the human attention span, that sense of celebration is probably worn pretty thin or gone by now for many. In this day and age of ever increasing desire for instant gratification, one may be thinking that it's time to move on; surely you've already seen the countdowns to Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Compounding that is this tendency to dwell on the negative while preferring to accentuate the positive. While it is easier to recall the negative, the preference is to move past that quickly and on to the better things. The best way to do that is to keep moving forward and quickly. If something undesirable happens, no problem, you'll be flying by it in a heartbeat. Even better if you can avoid it all together, or ignore it, or pretend like it didn't happen. In every aspect of modern life, and I contend that it's really nothing new, one likes to keep a move on.

Avoid the bad, avoid conflict, keep the peace, stick to the good...such is this way of life. And, like the fast pace one generally sticks to in life, I contend that this is nothing new.

This is a common occurrence in the Church, too. No one likes the Law preached to them, so some will try to find a place where they only hear "uplifting" sermons—that is, sermons that pat them on the back and tell them they're doing a pretty good job, even though they stumble every now and again. Some will try to force their preacher's hand not to preach the Law with one tactic or another: withholding offerings, slandering him and his family, complaining to ecclesiastical supervisors...there is no end to the vices that can be used. And, many preachers easily succumb to these temptations as they try to "keep the peace" (which is really no peace at all) and keep the numbers in the pews and in the plates (especially in harder economic times).

And then, this is the text you hear as the church has moved past the halfway point of the Easter Season. Jesus said, "A little while, and you will not see me...you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice." Jesus pointed out that there will be an undesirable time in a little while. One cannot zoom past it. It is unavoidable. It cannot be ignored. There is no sense in pretending like it won't happen. You can't force your way around it. "You **will** weep and lament."

However, the world would rejoice at this time. The world—this sinful, fallen world—is diametrically opposed to the Son of God, the person through whom it was created. The world would rejoice when it no longer saw Jesus, for it believed that it had won a victory. The world is rejoicing right now at the apparent lack of Jesus. And you, who rejoice in the Holy Trinity, who are in the world but not of the world, will be sorrowful.

Now, at first glance it would appear that Jesus was speaking of his death and resurrection. "A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me..." In a little while, Jesus would be out of view, but a little while later, He would be back. It makes sense. The disciples did weep as Jesus died. They scattered out of fear and confusion. There was certainly great sorrow at that time. And the world did rejoice. They mocked Him: "You saved others, save yourself if you really are the Christ!" (cf. Luke 23:35) The world had won, so it seemed.

Of course, you know otherwise. For God the Father had willed that His Son die for the sins of the world, that the Son shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. It wasn't the world that won as Jesus

hung dead on the cross, but God. God had won the victory over the devil, for in the person of the Son, the devil's head was crushed; no longer did the devil have any authority.

He won the victory over the world, too. That which was created through the Son is now redeemed by Him. St. John wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2) On the third day, He rose again, a victor over death, which is the way of the world, restoring everlasting life. This is the gift He gives to all who believe in Him, or as St. John also wrote, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." (1 John 4:15)

That resurrection is certainly cause for joy and celebration. "[Y]our sorrow will turn into joy," Jesus continued. And it is a joy still celebrated this day, this Fifth Sunday of Easter: **Hallelujah! Christ is risen!** Jesus was back within view. The disciples saw Him again.

But, there is something else that Jesus said which indicates that what He was not only talking about His death and resurrection: "A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me, *because I am going to the Father.*" No, what Jesus was referring to was not only His death and resurrection, but also His ascension. "In a little while, you will not see Me because I go to the Father, but you will see Me again when I return to take you to where I am."

Circumstances for sorrow are a little different here. Disciples know that Jesus is not dead, but seated at the right hand of God. It's the worldly influence that causes sorrow in this case.

Not much is written of how the world reacted to Jesus' resurrection. St. Matthew wrote that some guards reported the resurrection to the ruling priests, who then bribed the guards to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body. (cf. Matthew 28:11-15) The ruling priests' lie spread throughout the country, so it can be assumed that any actual account of the resurrection was not believed by anyone of the world. To the world, it seemed, Jesus was still dead and it had won the victory.

So, the world would continue its mockery of the followers of Jesus. It does its hardest to prove the foolishness of being a follower one who is dead. It points to physical death as the proof that Jesus' death and supposed resurrection did nothing. It will claim that illness and disease are proof that Jesus had no power to save. He was just a raving lunatic, a radical teacher, in its estimation. The fact that bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people is enough proof to the world to claim that there is no God. And their litany of proofs for a powerless Jesus and non-existent God go on and on and on. You live, you die, that's it...it's completely logical—and meaningless.

And that brings me back to where I started this morning in this sermon. Celebration is short-lived. There will be weeping and lamenting and sorrow. You cannot get past that.

The world is hell-bent on destruction and wants to take you along for the ride. Their arguments are logically convincing; you have little else than the Word to counter them, and every time you use it, it seems to fall on deaf ears. And there's also that little voice inside that is always nagging at you, trying to convince you that what you believe is useless. You are madly attacked on all sides, from within and without. It is relentless, sometimes to the point of despair and doubt.

O little flock, fear not the foe which madly seek your overthrow; dread not his rage and power. What though your courage sometimes faints, his seeming triumph over God's saints lasts but a little hour. As true as God's own Word is true, not earth nor hell with all their crew against us shall prevail. A jest and byword are they grown; God is with us, we are His own; our victory cannot fail.

"As true as God's own Word is true," so let me return to the Word from this morning's Gospel:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Or, as Jesus said in another part of St. John's Gospel:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (John 14:16-20)

God certainly did win a victory over the devil, crushing his head and removing all authority from him through the person of His Son. God the Son won the same victory over the world, being the propitiation for the world's sin—for your sin. And He sends the Helper, the Comforter, the Counselor—the Spirit of truth to continue to battle against the third part the unholy triumvirate with you: your sinful flesh.

As Jesus said before this morning's Gospel: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7) Because He went, He sends the Counselor—the Holy Spirit. This is the gift given to all who have been Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, for there you receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, having been Baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. "[Y]ou know Him," Jesus declares, "for He dwells with you and will be in you." He is with you and in you to help and comfort you, to combat against your sinful flesh.

How? Jesus said, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14) He will take from what is of Christ, and declare it to you. He is always at work to do this, never seeking glory for Himself, but doing it to the glory of Christ who sent Him. It is, after all, Christ and His work that He proclaims.

What is of Christ? First of all, it is His Word. He is the Word. All that is written in the Holy Scriptures is Him. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers to put to paper that which is Christ; now, that same Spirit works through that means—the written Word of God, which is Christ—to give you that Word—to give you Christ. You have the Word of God, by way of the Holy Spirit, to combat your sinful flesh. Your flesh says God does not exist; by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, you hear God say, I AM. Your flesh says God is a distant god who doesn't care for His creation; by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, you hear God say, "I am with you always to the end of the age." (cf. Matthew 28:20) Your flesh says God does not love you; by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, you hear God say, "I loved the world and you to the point of sending the Son in the flesh to die for the world and you, that whoever believes in Him should not perish have life everlasting." (cf. John 3:16)

Your sinful flesh doesn't like this, but it doesn't have the power to overcome it. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, St. John wrote, the light no darkness can overcome. (cf. John 8:12; John 1:5) He is the light that scatters all darkness, St. Paul wrote (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:5); therefore, the Helper dwells within you so that the Word would scatter the darkness of your sinful flesh.

In the second place, that which is of Christ that the Spirit declares to you is the work which Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection. Namely, this is forgiveness, life, and salvation. A brother in office, Rev. Peter Bender, once wrote, "Wherever the words of Jesus are, there is the Holy Spirit to give us life through the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name."<sup>1</sup> Not only does the Spirit open your hearts and minds to hear Jesus, but He does more to battle against your sinful flesh: He really and truly gives what the Word declares. The Spirit takes from what is Christ's and gives it to you, quite literally.

Once again, your sinful flesh doesn't like this, but it doesn't have the power to overcome it. Your sinful flesh only takes from you, it doesn't give anything to you. It robs you of life—the wages of sin is death—and constantly reminds you of it. You grow faint and ill, and these are symptoms of your sinful flesh at work against you, symptoms your own sinful flesh will use to persuade you that God is not for you, that God has condemned you.

Not the Holy Spirit, however. He wages battle against your sinful flesh, not taking away from you, but giving to you. Your flesh says you are a gross sinner and you are dying for it; by the power of the Holy Spirit, giving what the Son of God has won, it is declared to you by God and His Word that you are forgiven for all of your sins. Not only does the Word declare this to you, and your hearts and minds are open to hear it by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit takes from the Word and really and truly gives what the Word says: forgiveness of sins. And if you are forgiven for all of your sins, then you also have life and salvation.

Therefore, in the Holy Spirit, you celebrate...you continue to celebrate and always celebrate. Though the world around is decaying and destroying itself, though it appears as if the devil is having his way, though your sinful flesh rages against you, **you are of Christ**. That is cause for celebration!

You have been Baptized into the name of the Triune God, and through Baptism you have been crucified with Christ, therefore it is no longer you who live, but Christ lives in you by the power of the Holy Spirit. The life which you now live in the flesh you live by faith, God-given faith by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, faith in the Son of God, who loves you and gave Himself for you and now lives and reigns with the Father. (cf. Galatians 2:20) Therefore you celebrate, because the Holy Spirit gives you this which is of Christ: you are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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1 [Lutheran Catechesis](#), The Sacrament of the Altar