

*“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”*

From the Gospel of St. John

Today we continue to look at what Jesus said to his disciples at the last supper. Last week he said the disciples sorrow, when he is going away from them, is going to be as difficult as labor pains. The disciples will suffer, but their suffering will turn into joy, just as all of our own suffering will turn into joy at the end of the world.

Today his focus is on what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes to earth. We need to be clear on the fact that “Holy Spirit” and “Holy Ghost” are absolutely equivalent expressions and mean exactly the same thing. “Ghost” is Anglo-Saxon and “Spirit” is Latin, and they both mean “breath” or “wind”.

You know that someone is alive, because you can see that he is breathing. So the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit is the life force of God - the evidence that he is alive and present with his people here on earth. Jesus says that the Holy Ghost is like the wind. You can see the evidence of the wind’s activity, but you cannot see the wind itself. When Jesus sent the apostles out to forgive sins, in his name and so to extend the experience of the resurrection into time, he breathed on them.

At any rate, Jesus tells them, in today’s gospel, that there are three specific things the Holy Ghost will reveal to the world. Since we are two thousand years into this process of revealing, and we have had the benefit of the Holy Ghost that long, they should be things we recognize and understand.

First of all, the Spirit will show the world what sin really is. Jesus says, “That all sin comes from not believing in him.” If you believe in him you will trust him, and if you trust him you will do what he wants you to do. Sin is not doing what he wants you to do.

Second, the Holy Ghost will show them where true righteousness comes from. Jesus says that his ascension will prove to the world who was right, in the great debate between himself and the Jewish leadership. When he goes back to his Father, in front of the disciples, there will be no doubt that he is who he said he was - God himself. Faking ascension into heaven would be impossible.

Third, the Holy Ghost will reveal to the world Jesus’ judgment on the devil. The greatest power the devil has over us is to make us afraid of dying. Jesus’ resurrection shows us that we don’t have to be afraid of dying. What happened to him will happen to us because we are part of his body.

Jesus’ victory over sin and death for our sakes is what the church proclaims until he comes again. The Holy Ghost is the one who leads the church and helps the church make that proclamation.

The things Jesus tells the disciples the Spirit will do are the things we know he has done for the past two thousand years. The truths the Spirit was going to reveal are in fact the things he revealed. The church has lasted all this time teaching the very same things.

What we mean when we say we are a catholic and apostolic church is that we have remained faithful to all the things that Jesus taught the disciples, and we have responded to the Spirit as he has led us into a deeper understanding of those truths. The Holy Spirit cannot and will not change his mind. Churches which do not remain faithful to the basic deposit of truth in the Bible are not taken seriously as Christian churches at all.

Jesus goes on to say, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.” The best way to

understand what he is talking about is to remember that when he went back to heaven, the church did not have many of the things that we now take for granted. There were no creeds, no settled form of church government, no New Testament, no clarity about the sacraments, no Prayer books, no hymnals, no altar guild materials, and no canon law.

The church developed all of these things over a long period of time. We believe the Holy Spirit helped guide the church to make the right decisions. For the first thousand years of the church's existence it was undivided. During that time it was at least, in theory, possible for all of the bishops to meet.

Getting the bishops together to decide important issues followed the practice in the Book of Acts of the Apostles. There all of the Apostles got together to decide important issues involving the church at that time. One of the most important issues was whether gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians. When the apostles came to a unanimous agreement, they wrote a letter about it to the whole church which began, "It seemed good to the Holy ghost and to us..."

It was a series of such meetings of bishops - which we call ecumenical councils - that much of what we take for granted got worked out - such things as the creeds, the list of the books of the Bible, and the government of the church by bishops. We accept the decisions of the ecumenical councils, because the Holy Ghost was leading the bishops into all truth as Jesus promised.

The existence of the catholic and apostolic church two thousand years later testifies to what Jesus promised. The persistence of the church is evidence of the resurrection of Christ. Human beings could not have kept the church going alone. That is why Jesus says, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."