

## Easter 5C (5/2/10 – *The Risen Christ Sends His Spirit to Give Us Joy*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Our *Holy Gospel* for this Sunday can be a little perplexing ... even a bit daunting. It was surely so for the Disciples gathered that *Holy Thursday* before the Lord was betrayed and crucified. Jesus knew what was about to happen, and He wanted to forewarn His Disciples. But He also knew that they were unable to bear it all just now – both the immediate future of His death ... and the longer-term future of their own persecution and suffering and martyrdom for the sake of His Gospel. So Jesus was content to give them just a little bit ... and promise that in good time the Holy Spirit of Truth would guide them in the future – just as God had done for centuries with His people ... the Word we have recorded in the Old Testament.

**We** know what happens. Judas betrays Christ with a kiss. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin drum up a horde of false witnesses, yet cannot condemn and sentence Jesus on that basis because their testimony fails to agree. But finally they have no need of any other testimony – Jesus admits that He is God Who will be enthroned in heaven and come in glory ... and they declare Him to be a blasphemer, meriting death ... and then turn Him over to Pilate. Meanwhile the Disciples all abandon Jesus – betray Him in their own ways ... deny Him. We are like them – each in **our** own way ... **each** of us **daily** ... by our sinful thoughts and words and deeds.

*A little while* – later ... when Jesus is crucified, dead, and buried – **and** the Disciples **will see** Him **no longer**. But **again a little while** – later ... on the Third Day – **and** they **will see** Him again [JN 16.16]. We know this – we live after these events ... God had them recorded for our benefit and faith. But imagine, if you will, how this all must have seemed to the Disciples. All they know is that Jesus is going away – going to be handed over and crucified. He's told them several times – even if they didn't want to believe it ... even if Peter declared that it would never happen. And it will happen. And they will be sorrowful and will weep and lament. We know it. It's so easy – from our perspective, nearly 2000 years after the fact – to say, “You guys don't need to worry and wonder and be confused ... it'll all be OK. Just

wait until the Third Day and you'll see ... literally."

But we can't take our own medicine very well. How easily we look at the difficulties in our own life – and despair and wring our hands in doubtful, sinful worry. Even if we don't really think it – when pushed to think about our circumstances objectively – we act and worry as if we were in the most horrible situation known to mankind ... as if **our** situation ... **mine** specifically ... were worse than any other believer has ever lived through. That is one of the weaknesses of our sinful flesh – we see it in the Disciples here in the Upper Room ... we hear about it (implied) in the Corinthian congregation, to whom St. Paul says by inspiration: *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.* [1COR 10.13] That you may be able to endure it ... **with your faith, salvation, and eternal life** intact is what Paul is saying. And still I am so curved in on myself that I think I must surely be the worst-off believer there ever was.

Ah ... but then there is Job ... and the Apostles who were martyred ... and the many Christian martyrs throughout the ages. *No temptation* – no affliction ... no trial or tribulation ... no poverty ... no health problem ... no mental torment or anguish – *has overtaken you that is not common to man.* That's what God says. Or to say it the way God does through the Preacher of Ecclesiastes: *there is nothing new under the sun* [ECCL 1.9]. So to think that I am the worst off is simply sinful, self-centered thinking – which is also common to all mankind.

Jesus knew the thinking of man [JN 2.25]. That is why He tells the Disciples what He does, but graciously refrains from giving them more than they – and **we** – can bear. Instead, seeing ... knowing ... and caring about their dismay, the Lord comforts them – and promises us His Holy Spirit of truth [16.13] ... and a joy that cannot be taken away [16.22].

*I have many things to say to you – about serving Me and the Church in all the world ... and how you will be persecuted by your fellow Jews and others wherever you go in My Name – but you cannot bear them now.*

*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will recall to your mind the Word you have heard ... the Word of Holy Scripture ... the Word that is the gracious speaking of the Triune God. And this is how you will know that it is the Holy Spirit that teaches and guides and comforts you: He will simply speak what you have already heard ... what has already been recorded in Holy Writ – 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. Which is to say, He will not draw attention to Himself – much less to you yourself ... or any other person – but will always point you to Me and My coming in the Name of the Father. The Spirit of truth will always draw your attention to My coming in the Flesh to bear your sins and to take them away by being nailed to the Cross in your stead. The Holy Spirit will point you to My glorious resurrection the Third Day as proof that My work has atoned for all your iniquity ... and that My Life shall be your life forever. The Sanctifier will remind you that I have come to you and seen you ... and made you Mine in the waters of Holy Baptism. He will recall to your memory the fact that I ascended into heaven to watch over you and all believers – to guard you and keep you safe in My flock as your great Good Shepherd ... to graciously reign over you as Your loving King ... to ever intercede on your behalf before the Father as your High Priest.*

Jesus spoke this Word to the first Disciples since He was about to be taken from them in a very little while – and then in just three days they would see Him again and again throughout forty days. But after that little while, the Lord was again taken from their sight – when He ascended into heaven – and they were again sorrowful ... until Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon them on the Day of Pentecost. And it was, really, just a little while until they saw Him again – when they were, one by one, taken from this earth and brought into His eternal sight in heaven. For, although they lived out their lives here on earth, their joy was in heaven. And even though they had to undergo persecution – even painful martyrdom, some of them – the joy of sins forgiven and the certain promise of eternal life could not be

taken from them. For they followed in footsteps of their Savior, Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, scorning its shame [HEB 12.2].

The Scriptures are full of examples of that joy – singing while in prison ... refusing to relent of preaching Christ no matter what earthly consequence ... praying in the strength of Christ for the forgiveness of those who stoned them ... rejoicing to see a glimpse of Christ in glory even before they closed their eyes in the sleep of death. Indeed, the history of the Church is full of saints singing joyfully as they marched into the arena of persecution to die in the mouths of lions ... or to be burned at the stake ... or slain with the sword before the ravenous minions of the evil one. And thankfully, so far none of us have suffered so greatly for the Kingdom of Christ. But regardless – whether it is Stephen the first Christian martyr ... or the Apostle James slain by the sword of Herod ... or St. John who lived a long life and died some 60 years or more afterward ... or one of the believers here at St. John who have gone before us ... or we who suffer in earthly troubles – really, it is only a *little while* before we see Christ our Lord in the glories of heaven ... a blink or twinkling of the eye, the Lord might say [1COR 15.52], since a thousand years are as yesterday to Him [PSA 90.4]. Before we know it, we are delivered from this shadow of death into the great eternal light of heaven.

For now, dear saints, you live in this valley of sorrows and are in travail – in the world that rejoices in the death of the Son of God and in the persecution of His saints here on earth. For now you have trial and tribulation, sickness and sorrow, pain and persecution, death and dying. But God promises that *He will wipe away every tear from your eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things* – tainted by sin and death – will *have passed away* [REV 21.4]. Christ promises that though *you have sorrow now*, He *will see you again* in heaven, *and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you* ... forever. It is yours even now – that's why the risen Christ sends you His Holy Spirit ... to give you joy. And no one and nothing can take it away from you.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]