

Cantate, A ✠ D 2010
John 16:5-15

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

1 Rejoice, sing, and pray. These are the names of the fourth, fifth, and sixth Sundays of Easter. Jubilate, cantate, et rogate. This is the Christian life: rejoice, sing, pray. These are the privileges of Christians: rejoice, sing, pray. These are for the newly baptized, newly initiated into the Church, and those baptized a long while ago, those still wet behind the ears and those for whom every washing of water and sprinkling of rain is a reminder of the water of Holy Baptism. Rejoice, sing, pray.

2 So, sing. Cantate. There is a quote attributed to St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in north Africa: "He who sings [well] prays twice." Whether Augustine really wrote this or not is open for debate, but the sentiment runs strong throughout the Church's worship. Sing. Almost nowhere else do people gather to sing together. Why? Song adds beauty. Luther wrote, "Next to theology, I give music the highest place of honor." We adorn everything in our church buildings with beauty, windows and architecture. We cover our pastors with vestments and clothe our words in song and chant. Because chanting is something we never encounter in our everyday lives, it marks the time in the Divine Service as something truly unique. Like nothing else in our lives, in the Divine Service, our Lord meets us with his good gifts. That simply doesn't happen in the same way anywhere else. So it should feel, look, and sound different when we gather in the Lord's house.

3 What shall we sing? The Church's song is different from every other song. It is the song of salvation. And you cannot sing it by yourself. The song is enabled by the Breath, that is, by the Holy Spirit, as the word is the same in Hebrew. It is the Breath, the Spirit, who gives life and song. You cannot by your own reason or strength sing this song, but the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified, and kept you in the song of faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church in heaven and on earth and keeps it in the song of salvation, the song of Jesus Christ. The Spirit gives words to our song. He is the Breath by which the Church lives, breathes, and sings. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no song to sing, no knowledge of truth. But when He came at Pentecost, a mere fifty-three days after Jesus spoke the words of today's Gospel, He came convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

4 So sing. Sing as the Church through the Holy Spirit has given you song. The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin because they do not believe in Christ. Apart from faith in Christ, everything is sin. The world has little tolerance for this work of the Holy Spirit. Before you even began, you were damned. Surely you were sinful from before birth, sinful from the time your mother conceived you. Your human nature is spoiled with sin. Worse, not only are you damned by original sin, but you're damned by the sin you commit every hour. You sin by doing what you should not and by not doing what you should. Your wicked thoughts are no

different from wicked actions in their power to damn. Repent. The Holy Spirit wants to convict you of sin and lead you to repentance. This is your song.

5 But the song does not end there. The Holy Spirit comes convicting the world of righteousness: concerning righteousness because Jesus has departed to His Father, and you no longer see Him. He comes to convict of righteousness, but not your righteousness. He already convicted you of sin. This righteousness is Christ's, and the Holy Spirit comes to make it yours. The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ. This blessed exchange is the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes your sin, of which He has convicted you, and gives it to Jesus. And then He takes the very righteousness of Jesus and convicts you of that instead. That's the work of the Holy Spirit—to point you to Christ. Jesus promised, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all 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." His role is not to point you to Himself but to the One who died for your sins.

6 The song continues. The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning judgment because this prince of this world has been judged. The death and resurrection of Jesus delivered you from judgment. Instead, your enemies are judged and condemned. The devil is convicted; you are acquitted. Sin is bound, and you are released. Death is defeated, and you are promised life.

7 So sing! Sing with the psalmist the words of the Introit. Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him. He has remembered His steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. And sing with the prophet Isaiah, "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me." God is fiercely angry with sin, and justifiably so. Sin is rebellion against Him, choosing death over the life He offers freely. But all of His unquenchable wrath has been spent, turned away, poured out on Jesus instead, so that He might comfort you. So you sing of His mercy, His never-ending kindness to those whose sin has been taken away and answered for by Jesus. If you've been to the Wednesday evening Service of Prayer and Preaching—a time for hearing the life-giving Word of God and studying the catechism that is beneficial for all members of Hope—you know the rest of Isaiah's song. "The Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation."

8 The Holy Spirit has taken what is Christ's, namely His righteousness, and declared it to you. He has declared of you, beloved baptized child of God, that you no longer belong to the devil, death, and sin. Now you belong to God. The Spirit of truth continues to guide you in all truth. He convicts you of sin and leads you to repentance. He sends ministers to take what is Christ's—forgiveness—and to declare it to you, to deliver it to you in Holy Absolution. And the Holy Spirit takes what is Christ's—His Body and Blood—and delivers them to you for the full forgiveness of your sins.

9 So sing with the Church. Join her Kyrie “Lord, have mercy” and her Gloria in Excelsis “Glory to God in the Highest.” Learn to sing with her Psalm 51 “Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a right Spirit within me.” Sing with her the Sanctus, praising Incarnate God who comes in the forms of bread and wine. Make her song your own as you join your voice to the cacophony of voices throughout millennia who have sung her Agnus Dei, praising the Lamb of God who comes in His holy Supper. Sing with her the Nunc Dimittis, confessing in song that the true Body and Blood of Christ have prepared you for the sleep of death and the resurrection on the Last Day. Sing with her her treasury of hymns, recounting the story of salvation into which she has joined you. Sing that story of salvation, the story of the God who took human flesh to die for sinners and to rise victorious from the grave, because it is your story. The Lord God is your strength and your song, and He has become your salvation. Sing.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer