

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We hear these words from our Gospel reading again - **John chapter 16:8-11** “**When [the Paraclete] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**” So far the word of the Lord...

The religion of Christ, the only true religion, is a very great stumbling block for the world. According to Jesus, no one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn 14:6). No other religion saves, because there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The world looks at this truth and says that they can't believe in a God who condemns all other religions. They tell us to look at those who give so much of their time and money and effort to help the poor. What kind of a God would condemn such loving and kind people to hell, just because they don't believe in Jesus?

A person might have a very great amount of external righteousness. To the outside observer, they may seem to be perfect - no obvious sins committed.

Yet there is a part of the Law of God that they do not keep, even if they could somehow keep every other part. The second table of the Law says “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” Many unbelievers may seem to do that. Yet the first table says, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**” The unbeliever simply cannot do that. If they don't know the true God, then they certainly can't fear, love, and trust in Him. And if they do not fear, love, and trust in God, then they are not really obeying the rest of the commandments, no matter how much it might seem they are. Their “good” deeds, no matter how flashy and glorious in

the sight of men, are actually filthy rags. As the prophet Isaiah writes, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Is 64:6).**

You also must believe in Jesus, or all of your “good” deeds are nothing at all. St. Paul writes, **“We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16).**

That’s why our Lord says in the Gospel reading for today that the world will be convicted of sin - because they do not believe in Him (Jn 16:9). Unbelief is the primary sin above all sins. Because of unbelief, all of the seemingly “good” deeds of unbelievers are not really good at all. You can’t keep any of the commandments without first having fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

By God’s grace, we have received the free gift of faith. We believe because the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, the Comforter, has placed faith in our hearts. Yet the heart remains sinful. You and I continue to commit sins each and every day. This side of heaven, your faith will never be perfect. It may sometimes be weak. While you yet live, unbelief will continue to dwell within you.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit convicts all the world of sin. Not only unbelievers are condemned. You and I are condemned as well.

Should we be afraid for our salvation because our hearts cannot believe as they should? No. The faith that saves you is not your doing. You can’t summon faith out of your emotions or your intellect. It’s not your decision or choice. True, saving faith isn’t from you at all. It’s the gift of God, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9). The Spirit has given you faith, even you who do not deserve

it. And along with faith, He's given you eternal life, as well as the forgiveness of all your sins, all on account of Christ.

Christ adds in our text that the Spirit **“will convict the world... of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you will see Me no more” (Jn 16:8, 10)**. There is only one kind of righteousness by which a person is saved. That is the righteousness of Christ which He secured for you by dying, rising, and ascending to the right hand of the Father.

You can't see that righteousness. The world may examine your deeds and conclude that you are good or evil, depending on what standard they use to judge. Regardless of what the world sees or how they judge you, they can't see your true righteousness. This is because your true righteousness is not your deeds. It is Christ.

Christ lived the only perfect life. That's your righteousness. Christ suffered to remove your sins from God's record forever. That's your righteousness. Christ rose from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand, so that your human nature would be seated at the throne of glory. That also is your righteousness. Your righteousness is the righteousness of the Son of God Himself. And that righteousness far outshines anything the world can do, even if it put all of its good deeds together into a giant pile. Your righteousness is far better.

Of course, the world despises this God-given righteousness. They think it's not fair. They want to merit salvation on the basis of their own self-righteousness, their own “good” deeds. But their own self-righteousness will never measure up to God's standards.

You were that way once. You were part of the world, stuck in self-righteousness and unbelief. But God rescued you by His Spirit. He snatched you out of this doomed world full of death, and has

given you the life of His own Son. You did not choose Christ. Rather, He chose you, and His righteousness was given to you as a free gift by the Spirit.

This same Spirit also **“convicts the world... of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:8, 11)**. Christ has conquered the powers of this world. The serpent’s head is crushed. Death has lost its sting. Hell is an empty threat for you, because Christ has already judged you innocent.

The world doesn’t want to acknowledge the existence of the devil. Or if he does exist in their opinion, they believe that he must live on eternally as the opposite of goodness. According to some in the world, there can be no good without evil, no darkness without light, no God without the devil.

But that’s not true. The devil isn’t an equal of God. There’s no eternal arm wrestling match. The devil’s already been beaten, and is passing away. He’s mortally wounded, and soon to be cast into eternal death in the lake of fire. You might think of Luther’s great Reformation hymn *“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”* (LSB 656:3):

This world’s prince may still / Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none. / He’s judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

Christ didn’t achieve this triumph for Himself. He conquered sin, death, and the devil for your sake. Because of His victory on the cross and in the empty tomb, we look forward to a world free from evil and death. We look forward to a world that is the home of righteousness, where everything will be as perfect as the righteousness that Christ has given to you.

This is your future, purchased for you by Christ, delivered to you by the Spirit. There is no doubt, for God has done it, and He does not fail. We have reason to sing to the Lord a new song as

our Introit states. For He has revealed His righteousness to the nations. Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed, alleluia!] Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.