

Easter IV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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Every good endowment and every perfect give is from above.

That verse is a welcome reminder to give thanks for those who have imitated the generosity of God, and whose gifts and endowments have established this Church and Diocese. Whatever we give, whether our weekly tithes, or special gifts or endowments, these are acknowledgements that we are stewards, that all things come of God, that every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above.

But what we must first reckon with are the gifts and endowment of God which are chiefly our spiritual mercies, as Saint James puts it. These are our rebirth and our salvation, that we are the redeemed children, born again and saved by God's grace, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

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Jesus tells his disciples that his going from them is to their advantage, for his going from us in the flesh means his coming to us in the Spirit. He is with us always and everywhere by the Holy Spirit, and he dwells within us, in our hearts by faith, by the Holy Spirit.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus promises the leading of the Holy Spirit - he will guide you into all truth.

Now we face in our day, as there has always been in the Church, many differences about where the Spirit might be leading us. And this discerning together as the Church, the whole body of Christ - the Church Catholic or universal, in other words - is necessary. It must begin in deep study and prayer, as well as in discussion. But Jesus makes clear that the leading of the Spirit will involve two things always. 1. The Spirit always leads us in ways that glorify Jesus Christ. "He will take what is mine and declare it

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unto you.” 2. The Spirit will teach us and lead us in accordance with what Jesus has taught.

So when we seek to discern the Spirit’s leading, we need to ask, “Does this glorify Jesus, and does this accord with his teaching?” Yet even before Jesus speaks about the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, he tells us of the threefold teaching of the Holy Spirit. He will convince 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; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Now these are the three most important lessons, the three key and first things that the Holy Spirit teaches men and women.

1. The Holy Spirit convinces us of Sin. It is a gift to come to our senses and to recognize our sins. The Holy Spirit brings light and sensitivity to our dull and dark consciences. When St. Peter

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preached his first Sermon, at Pentecost, the reaction was this: “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart.” That is the first convincing of the Holy Spirit. Remember, Peter knew the pain, but also the gift, of hearing the cock crow and having one’s conscience pricked. Paul writes, “Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret.” So God the Holy Spirit comes to convince us of sin, which is at its root, disbelief, so that we may repent, turn from our sins to our Saviour, and have that change of mind and heart. All sin is unbelief. Romans 14.23 says, “for whatever does not proceed from **faith** is **sin**.” For if we think only of Adam and Eve’s sin, what was it, but to disbelieve the goodness and generosity of God?

2. The Holy Spirit convinces us of Righteousness. There is no use in knowing our sins, of acknowledging our wretchedness, unless there

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is mercy and forgiveness to be had. The Holy Spirit teaches us of Christ's innocence and righteousness, and how that may be ours.

Jesus Christ died, rose again and ascended to the Father, to make a way for us, that we might be made righteous and inherit the kingdom of heaven.

The Spirit convinces us of that righteousness which is the Lord's, and which may be ours by faith in Jesus Christ. For the Christian, it is the righteousness of Christ that really matters eternally, and our hope of going to the Father is founded and grounded in him - the righteous one who has gone to the Father for us, to prepare a place for us. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, Paul calls this in Romans 3.22.

3. The Holy Spirit convinces us of Judgment. ...not just of the last judgment, but of the overthrow by Christ of all that is evil. For he

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must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death! Those who receive the Holy Spirit are convinced of the final and complete victory of Jesus Christ over each and every evil, and of their share in that. That victory is fundamentally over sin and death, and that victory is ours, in the forgiveness of sins and in eternal life.

So, convinced of Christ's victory over the world, the flesh and the devil, over sin and death, by the Holy Spirit, we are then further promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are three things, then, that God would have us know: our own sin, the saving righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the judgment of the prince of this world – in other words, the end of the devil's rule over this world, but also over you and me, over our hearts and bodies, our families and communities.

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The Holy Spirit convinces us of our **past** sins, of our **present** forgiveness, and of our **future** victory and triumph. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, converts us to our Saviour, and confirms the victory of Christ and our share in it.

By the Holy Spirit, we may know the love and victory of Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again the third day. We come to know that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us, and that nothing can or shall separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

But if we are to be taught and led by God the Holy Spirit, James shows us what kind of students or disciples we must be. He says, “Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for human anger does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

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Who here is not convicted by James, when he says that human anger does not serve the righteousness of God? How can we be taught and led by the Spirit? Only if we are open and receptive, humble and gentle, James says. Open and receptive, humble and gentle, these are the souls that may be taught and led by the Spirit of God.

We come seeking to be convinced of the truth, the truth that shall make us free. We come to be taught and led by God, as St. Paul prayed, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, and that we may be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, to know the love of Christ that is beyond all comprehending and to be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen.