

Cantate with the Rite of Confirmation for Emily Brown and Tristana Tiro  
19 May, Anno Domini 2019  
St. John 16:5-15  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Beloved of God in Christ Jesus, today is a day of rejoicing for us all. Today we see again the fruits of the Holy Spirit's work, the very work which our Lord taught the disciples about in the Upper Room. Today, Emily and Tristana will confess before men and angels that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He alone is the source of their salvation. Today, these two young ladies will acknowledge the good gifts that were bestowed upon them at their Baptism. They have made diligent study of the Holy Scriptures and the Small Catechism, and as that Word has been proclaimed to them, the Holy Spirit has continued to strengthen their faith and stir up their hunger for the Sacrament.

And at such a joyous occasion as today, it is extremely easy, as sinners are wont to do, to focus our attention in the wrong place, rejoice in the wrong things, and miss the whole point. We want to say things to Emily and Tristana like "We are so proud of you," and "Congratulations" as though they have accomplished something through their own works and efforts. And certainly they have worked hard. They have studied the chief doctrines of Holy Scripture. They have tirelessly worked to learn by heart the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism - the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the texts of Holy Scripture which teach us of Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. They have anxiously sat and been examined by their parents, the Elders, and their pastor. They have been absolved of their sins. And we are proud of them. But, if they learned anything then all the praise should be met with a simple "Praise be to Christ who has done all of this for me."

The one who has done the work is the Holy Spirit who, through the apostolic preaching and teaching, has kept them in the true faith and continued to strengthen and deepen their faith in Christ as they have remained students of His Word. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." Through the Word of truth, the Holy Spirit has convicted them concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment. He has shown them their sinful nature which is completely incapable of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. In doing so, He has

graciously shown them their need for the redemption of Jesus' death and resurrection. He has brought forth faith in the promise that their sins have all been forgiven by the Lamb of God. He has brought them to believe and confess that they have no righteousness of which they can boast except the righteousness of Jesus who has offered Himself to the Father as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. He has revealed to them in Holy Scripture that the works and righteousness of the world are not of God. They are of the devil, our wily enemy who would deceive and mislead us into all kinds of false belief, despair and other great shame and vice.

That is our cause for rejoicing this day - that the Holy Spirit has continued to nourish and sustain faith in Emily and Tristana. It is solely His doing that today they will publicly confess that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary for the sole purpose of offering Himself as the ransom payment for our sin, that it is only by faith in this Jesus that anyone can be saved, and that God has appointed and instituted the Means of Grace - the Word and the Sacraments - as the sure and only means by which we can receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. By proclaiming the promises of Jesus to them, the Holy Spirit has stirred up in these two young Christians, as He does in all Christians, a hunger and thirst for the Lord's Body and Blood. They are truly worthy and well-prepared to receive this Divine food because they have faith in these words "Given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

This is the highest and, truly, only good that comes down from the Father of lights. As Jesus said "...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" On February 1, 2005 God heard the prayers of His Church and granted the Holy Spirit to Emily in the waters of Holy Baptism and granted her saving faith in Christ. On September 18, 2007 God again heard the prayers of His Church and bestowed the same Holy Spirit upon Tristana, granting to her the same saving faith in Christ. This is the gift of Holy Baptism, the washing of new birth by the Holy Spirit. Through the water and Word the Holy Spirit makes His home with the Baptized and gives them life by creating faith in Jesus. Let us now together confess the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning as found on page 323....

This is the order of salvation - for everyone. The Holy Spirit causes the Word of God to be preached in the world. Then, by that Word and only by that Word, does the Holy Spirit bring sinners to see their lost and condemned condition. He convicts them of their unbelief and hardness of heart, their idolatry in trying to find comfort and peace in the idols that they set up in their hearts - success, health and

image, power, wealth, sex, popularity, control, and goodness. He convicts them of their own unrighteousness, showing them that their own goodness is not good at all and that the only true righteousness comes from the crucified One who has risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father. He convicts them of what true sin is because the preaching and work of Jesus has been vindicated by the resurrection. The devil has been exposed as the lying murderer that he is and his works of death, selfishness, anger, harm, greed and all that is contrary to the holy will of God as revealed in the Ten Commandments have been judged.

Having accomplished the work of repentance, the Holy Spirit then pours forth in abundance the comfort and peace of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He breathes eternal life into the slain sinner and makes known to them that God is merciful and finds the greatest joy in receiving sinners into His family as beloved Baptized children.

Children of God, this is your story. This is what the Holy Spirit has done and continues to do for you as you remain steadfast in His Word. Like the most skilled surgeon He continues to reach into the deep recesses of your heart to find the sin that still lurks and cuts it out, preaching God's judgment against it, not to destroy you, but so that the healing medicine of the Gospel might be applied to it. There is salvation in no other way. And there is no other true comfort for the sorrow that remains in your hearts as we sojourn on this side of eternal life. Here we are surrounded by death and sadness, hatred and chaos. Here the innocent are slaughtered, the truth is oppressed, and wickedness is praised as the highest good.

Yet, by the mercy of God, we who were once a part of this darkness have been brought to the brilliant light of Christ Jesus who has overcome sin, death, and the grave. We have been rescued from a life lived in vanity and selfishness, a life spent chasing after glory and pleasure and honor. The Holy Spirit has graciously opened our eyes to the truth of God's Word and shown us the emptiness and danger of all that the world treasures and calls good. He has rescued us from empty works to serve the living God in faith and thanksgiving. We can take credit for none of this. It wasn't our choice or our work. All this goodness is purely a gift of our gracious Lord who has poured out His Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism. He continues to sow the seed of His Word into our hearts that we might be preserved unto everlasting life. It is the Holy Spirit who has broken through our hardened hearts and by the Word created in us new and contrite, cleansed by the Blood of Christ.

Emily and Tristana, we are proud of you. But far more than that, we give thanks to God this day for all that He has done for you and in you. We praise God that He has brought you forth of His own will and bestowed upon you all the blessings of Holy Baptism, that He has continued these years to nourish and strengthen your faith as you have been fed the Word by your parents, your pastors, and your teachers. Only don't think that you are finished. Heed the Word of the apostle and continue throughout all your days to receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls and without which, the faith you now confess will wither and die. Let prayer and daily Bible study be your habit. Let nothing keep you from gathering with your Christian family on the Lord's Day to hear the voice of Christ and sit together at your heavenly Father's table to receive the forgiving and life-giving food of Holy Communion. Make regular use of the opportunity to confess your sins and receive absolution from the under-shepherd God has given to you. You can no more do without these than you can expect to live without food and water.

You will be tempted. The devil will seek to lure you away and distract you with all sorts of things that seem harmless. Do not be fooled. Do not trust your flesh or your reason or the world. You have learned from God's Holy Word that the flesh and the Spirit are at war with one another and that you will either be ruled by God through His Word for your eternal salvation or you will be ruled by the devil for your eternal destruction. Do not forsake the truth that you confess this day. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by those false teachers who deny the gifts that God gave you in your Baptism, doing whatever it takes to entertain you, make you feel good, and stroke your ego so that you might trust in yourself rather than in Christ.

But you are not alone. We, your brothers and sisters in Christ, will continue to pray for you and encourage you and ask that you do the same for us. Christ, your Lord, prays for you before the throne of His Father. The Holy Spirit prays for you with groanings that are too deep for the words of man to express. And your heavenly Father hears them all and answers them. What you confess this day is pleasing to your heavenly Father. The whole Christian Church on earth along with the whole company of heaven rejoice at the marvelous work of salvation which has been worked in you. And as surely as you take up the Word of God and take, eat, and drink the Supper of Christ, the Holy Spirit will continue His work in you to strengthen you, to comfort you, to guard you, and to bring you safely to life everlasting with all of God's beloved children.

He who has begun a good work in you, will bring it to completion on the day of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Praise be to God!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.