



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday May 14th 2017 – Easter IV,

“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Two weeks ago I was out with my father, and we found ourselves at my favorite local watering hole. It's a microbrewery and taproom co-owned by five of my friends, and they even have an indirect tied to our parish here, as they brew the official “Captain C Pale Ale,” in honor of the late George Lewis, or as I, along with the rest of the children in Maryland knew him, Captain Chesapeake.

One of those five owners is my friend Johnny; we met 20 years ago in the local music scene and became fast friends. We were both IT consultants masquerading as rock stars on the weekends, or as we liked to think of it, rock stars masquerading as IT consultants Monday through Friday. When we'd finished catching up on jobs and families and the like, the talk naturally turned to religion, and Johnny said “Michael, I'm not sold on religion as a whole, but Jesus seemed really great. My question is, why isn't He here now? We could really use Jesus these days, this place is a mess and seems like it's only going to go downhill from here.”

I said “well, Jesus is no longer physically present to be sure; but in His absence, we've been given The Holy Spirit to guide us and walk with us through the mess.” This is naturally where my “non-religious” friend shot me a sideways glance and said “I'm talking about that religious stuff, Mike - I'm talking about a real presence here

with us.” Now I'd like to say that what ensued was deep theological talk that resulted in John's confession of faith followed by a baptism in one of the giant brewing vessels in the back, but it was entirely too late in the evening for that to really come to fruition. The good news is that he said he very much wanted to pick it back up one evening over some more Captain C Pale Ale, just as long as we started the conversation before 11pm.

It wasn't a fruitless conversation though, because it at least planted a seed in Johnny's mind that there's more going on than he sees with his eyes. And it got me thinking about how truly frail our understanding of The Holy Ghost really is. As a child, The Holy Ghost seemed to me to be a bit of a lesser character, some fella that hung around God and Jesus, but was certainly not on par with them; the kind of friend that was always on the periphery, but never chiming in on the heavy conversations. God was easy to picture, of course; He had a giant white beard and long flowing robes and He could do anything He wanted. Jesus likewise was easy to picture, owing both to the historical accounts of His ministry on earth, and all of the great Renaissance paintings which made him look tragically more like one of the Bee Gees than a Jewish Rabbi. But The Holy Ghost, He was a different story.

God the Father of course gets the credit for Creation, even though the Son and THS were there and co-workers with Him. And God the Son gets all the credit for redeeming mankind of its otherwise irredeemable sin, which is a pretty big deal. But too often, THS gets credit for being the person we say third in benedictions, and that's about it. And really, it's not a very fair deal for the third person of the Holy Trinity, is it? The third person of the Holy Trinity who hasn't had a day off in over two thousand years, and who has stewarded us and guided us and edified us and spiritually enveloped us to guard us against evil and heresy? This is He who has stamped our hearts with the indelible mark of God, so that if we'd shut up once in awhile, we might actually behave like Christians.

And this was really what I was trying to drive home to my friend Johnny. Now for Johnny, the jury is still out on the very concept of a divine creator, much less on the notion of the Holy Trinity. But the fact is that while Jesus' earthly ministry has indeed been ended for over two thousand years, we've been blessed with something far more apropos for where we are right now in the ongoing narrative of Creation. Jesus gave us the lessons; He taught us the model for living - but there's no more model to teach! And if He were to have an earthly ministry today, He'd just be repeating Himself, and probably be fairly annoyed to boot. And His redemptive work on the cross was obviously a price paid once, for all time. We don't need Jesus preaching on the mount and teaching us lessons; those lessons have been taught. What we need is The Holy Spirit to guard us and guide us and keep us and teach us.

The gifts and purpose of The Holy Spirit would span six months of Sundays worth of sermons before we even scratched the surface. In brief though, The Holy Spirit convicts the world of its sin, and transforms us in the eyes of God. He helps us to remember the Word of God, and to lead a godly life. He bestows upon us spiritual gifts and empowers us to be good witnesses. And it is the Holy Spirit that works in our lives to sanctify and purify us, to lead us to our very belief and steward us in that faith.

This isn't just fanciful talk - and we need only look over church history to see the overwhelming power of THS and His work in God's people. Take the Apostles themselves, for example - they were in the presence of Christ Himself; they ate with Him, they drank with Him, they prayed with Him, and they witnessed miracles wrought by His hands *right in front of them*. Yet they were still mere mortals, not imbued with anything divine other than the divine spark that lives in all of God's creation. As such, they saw things strictly through mortal eyes and made decisions strictly with mortal minds. After the ascension, though? They were literally *indwelt by the Spirit of God* and became fearless preachers. Men who once denied Christ in front of witnesses and who hid during and after the crucifixion now saw it as an honor to die for His name, to trade their lives for the spreading of the Gospel.

THS continues to manifest itself in the lives of believers, that they might show the truth of Christ. All you have to do is listen. The fact is that we have not been abandoned. We have not been left here to suffer and figure things out and make do on our own.

Yes, our Lord ascended bodily to Heaven, and left His disciples and us here on this mortal coil. But we have been given a gift that nobody can take from us. We have been given a gift that is ours as long as we and the next generation, and the generations that come after them, are here on this planet. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit of God to guide us and to minister to us. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit of God to direct our actions, to direct our hearts, to correct us when we are in spiritual error, and to comfort us when we are hurting. God is still here with us. Jesus may not walk beside us physically, but one of the persons of the Trinity is literally here in this chapel right now, and will be with you when you get home. And when you're hurting or need guidance, He is there with you as much as Jesus sat and broke bread with His disciples; you just have to be quiet enough to listen to what He has to teach you. *Amen*