

Cantate

Psalm 98, John 16:5-15

May 2, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above.” Why then do you care so much for the gifts that are from below? Why are you so quick to speak, when God’s Word says every person should be **“slow to speak”**? Is it not because you consider your self most important? You want your will to be done.

And why are you quick to anger, when God’s Word says you should be *“slow to anger”*? Are you God? Has God made you judge? Your anger **“does not produce the righteousness that God requires.”** You gossip, grumble, and boast about things from below, then get angry when they do not go your way. But there is a better way. St. James says, **“My beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear.”** He is admonishing us to hear the Word of truth, the *“implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.”*

That is how the Holy Spirit comes to you; that is how the Holy Spirit works in you – by means of the Word, Holy Scripture. The Spirit declares the things to come—the regeneration of the world: corpses revived from the dust; sorrow and sighing put to flight; the lie is silenced, truth rings out like a trumpet, and the citizens of God’s Kingdom gather around the Lamb slain for us. Anticipating Pentecost, Jesus is teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will take the work of Jesus and declare it to us. How? Through Bible, through liturgy and Sacraments, pointing us to the kingdom of our true citizenship, teaching us to live in light of forgiveness and the coming resurrection.

The name of this Sunday is *Cantate*, which means, “Sing!” The content of the Church’s song is Christ and His work. The Bible tells us to sing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The Psalms comprise their own book in the Scriptures; the other songs or canticles in the Bible are called “hymns,” -

but what are these “spiritual songs”? It’s not a style of music – that terminology comes later. A “spiritual song” is a song that conveys the message of the *Holy Spirit*. By the Holy Spirit, St. Paul says, we call Jesus “Lord.” The Holy Spirit, Jesus says, “*Will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*” A spiritual song proclaims the Spirit’s message; it’s a song about Christ, who He is and what He does for us.

More simply: the content of a spiritual song is the Gospel.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is *not* a theory about God.

The Gospel is *not* an experience for you to have.

The Gospel is *not* a set of rules to live by.

The Gospel is *not* a program to improve society.

The Gospel is the good news that Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection has won us forgiveness of sins and life in God’s kingdom.

The Gospel is the victory of God over all death, all sin, all sorrow.

“Sing to the LORD a new song,” *because* “His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.”

Therefore the Church’s “new song” has nothing to do with musical style or instrumentation. We are a people who are liberated from the world’s “old song” of hatred, despair, and lust, the funeral dirges and anthems of kingdoms passing away. The new song is the song of the new kingdom that the LORD has inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Church’s liturgy is the new song. Throughout the Church’s history, the greatest composers have created music for it. Instruments have come and gone, styles have been added to our repertoire - but responsibly and carefully. The Apostles teach us to do all things decently and in order, and without giving offense.

The texts of certain songs have remained the same throughout our long history. Why do we keep repeating some of the same things? Let's take a look.

Every Divine Service we sing the *Kyrie*. "Kyrie" is Greek for "O Lord" – *Kyrie eleison*, "O Lord, have mercy!" We are broken sinners, slow to hear, quick to speak, quick to anger, not producing the righteousness of God. We have troubled relationships, troubled emotions, and troubled bodies plunging towards death. But this is our confidence: God in Christ is merciful.

From there, we sing the song the angels taught the shepherds at the first Christmas: *Gloria in excelsis Deo* – "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men." Every Divine Service is Christmas, for in every Divine Service Christ comes to us in the flesh in the Supper, and what we need most is God's peace and goodwill toward us men.

The third song is one we usually speak: the **Creed**. It summarizes for us the Gospel: The Father created us, the Son died for us, the Holy Spirit has joined us together in the one Baptism for the remission of sins, and we look for the resurrection of our dead bodies and life in the world to come.

Then in the Communion liturgy we sing the *Sanctus*—"Holy, holy, holy"—another song of the angels. Isaiah heard it in the temple, when one of the seraphim took a burning coal and touched it to his lips, saying, "*Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away.*" We sing the song Isaiah heard when that happened, knowing that something is about to touch our lips and take our iniquity away – more pleasant than a burning coal and more healing than any earthly food. So we sing the Psalm which the disciples applied to Jesus on Palm Sunday: "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

Thus from Christmas to Palm Sunday, we have been taken into the heart of Jerusalem, and from there we are led to sing the hymn of the cross

immediately before the gift of Communion: the *Agnus Dei*, "*Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us, grant us Your peace.*" The songs we sing are not only from Scripture – they are the heart of Scripture, the very center of our faith. The summary of the Divine Service is this: We believe in a merciful God, who proclaimed peace on earth in the birth of Jesus, who is Holy, who comes to us, dies for us, blesses us with forgiveness, who hears our prayers and grants us peace.

These unchanging songs are the "new song" of faith. So what does this Sunday teach us? We stop our talking and listen to the Word of God; we stop our anger and look to the forgiving God. We put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and sing the new song of Christ Jesus the Savior. As you live, and as you die, this new song is the soundtrack of your life.

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The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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