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¶THE SIXTH WORD The Finished Work of Christ FURTHER UP AND FARTHER IN

On this sixth Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection – the fifth after Easter – we give thanks for the fruit of the Son's Sixth Word from the Cross: "It is finished", or, more literally, "it is accomplished" (John 19:30). As on the sixth day the Lord finished making heaven and earth (Genesis 1:31-2:1), so in this sixth word Christ finished the work of redemption and new creation. His mission is accomplished, for "by his one oblation of himself once offered" he has propitiated wrath, expiated guilt, reconciled sinners, overcome our alienation, turned judgment to mercy and curse to blessing, completed the mediation of God and man. Nothing now holds him back from returning to the Father in the manhood he took upon himself from Mary. As he says in today's gospel lesson (St. John 16:23-33), "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" – a fact made visible in his Ascension (celebrated this coming Thursday). Entering into heaven on our behalf, he throws open the gates of prayer (the "rogation" which gives this Sunday its name), and gives us full access to the Father. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you". Nothing now holds us back from returning to God, in heart and mind. Precisely for this reason, therefore, the mediation of God and man which Christ has finished and perfected for us must yet be fulfilled in us. This is the point of the epistle lesson (St. James 1:22-27). "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves". It is in a thankful faith fruitful in good works that we show forth our Redeemer's praise: "With a voice of singing declare ye this, and let it be heard, alleluia: utter it even unto the end of the earth: the Lord hath delivered his people, alleluia, alleluia" (Introit. With Psalm 66. Vocem jucunditatis)

FURTHER UP AND FARTHER IN

This Sunday past the gospel lesson (John 16:5-15) spoke of the work of the Holy Ghost in the unbelieving world (vv.8-11), as the work of a prosecuting attorney (one of the meanings of the word "Paraclete" which is usually translated as "Comforter"). He "reproves" (convinces and convicts) the world that it was wrong about Christ – for his righteousness, rejected by men, is established by his 'going to the Father' (a phrase which refers both to his humble obedience at the

cross and his glorious exaltation to the Father's right hand). Thus convicting the world of Christ's righteousness, the Holy Ghost convicts the world of the sin of its unbelief, and also exposes the "Prince of this world" as a deceiver, holding the world captive in unbelief. Thereby the Holy Ghost delivers the world from unbelief to faith (cf Acts 2).

What happens, however, after we are converted to faith in Christ? Having brought us into the believing Church, what then is the work of the Holy Ghost? According to the gospel lesson, "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" - all the truth of the Father which is revealed in the Son. To be guided into all truth is much more than bare knowledge. It is rather a dynamic process, whereby the Spirit builds upon the foundations of faith, to clarify and deepen our understanding of the truth and our conformity to it. In the process we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

True and living faith, the faith which is the gift and work of the Holy Ghost, is not static but dynamic. It is not the end of the journey, but its beginning. For the truth into which the Holy Ghost guides us is the truth of an infinite perfection, whose depths we can never plumb, whose greatness we can never fully comprehend. The more we know of God, the more we find to know; and the more we know of God, the more we find to love. And the more there is to love, the more there is for us to strive for and to enjoy. "Further up and farther in!" Faith seeks vision of the truth which it believes, hope seeks possession of the good which it expects, and both are fulfilled in charity, that love which unites us to that highest Beauty, Truth, and Good, which faith discerns and hope seeks. The whole process is put very simply in this prayer to Christ by Saint Richard of Chichester:

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,

For all the benefits

which thou hast given me;

For all the pains and insults

which thou hast borne for me.

O most merciful Redeemer,

Friend, and Brother,

May I know thee more clearly,

Love thee more dearly,

And follow thee more nearly,

For ever and ever.

Amen.

The Rev'd Gavin G Dunbar

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