

Easter 1

I take as my text, from the 20th chapter of St. John's Gospel:

....when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

“Let the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord,, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

Today's Epistle and Gospel passages, both from St. John, come together as a powerful witness to Jesus Christ:

First as an emphatic witness, divine and human, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and

Second as an emphatic action of Jesus Christ in sending His Apostles to make witness of Himself throughout the world and to carry forth the witness to generations to come.

We are the inheritors of that witness. We are the continuation of the commission, for it is to us that the Apostles were sent. Whether clergy or laity, we who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour have also accepted the witness and thus have become inheritors of the charge to bear that witness.

It is to a Risen Christ that we bear witness, not to an empty tomb.

Imagine those days following the Crucifixion and throughout His appearances to His disciples.

At first, the hope and certainty that this is truly the Messiah is seemingly dashed as Jesus is nailed to the Cross, and His followers are dispersed in shock and despair.

Then, something momentous: the announcement that the tomb is empty and He has been seen.

First reaction is that this just another disappointment, a rumor to give false hope?

But, time after time, Jesus appears to all of His disciples and the reality takes hold: indeed, He is risen.

It's a "reality": it is not an apparition; it's not a "ghost"; it's not hysteria.

Jesus, standing in front of them, is tangible. He responds to them. They can touch Him. He joins with them in eating.

They are witness to a reality: Jesus Christ is risen; He is alive.

Then, to bear witness to that momentous event. Tell the world. That is what the Apostles were sent to do: to bring that witness to us that we may also witness to the Risen Christ.

And so we do. That is our calling.

"Witness": how many times have we just heard that word; how many times must we hear the word before it takes hold upon us?

In the passage from his First General Epistle, John speaks of the triple witness: the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood. Here, he gives us a very, very powerful perspective of the concept of "witness" that was essential to the Church from its earliest beginnings.

First, the witness of the Spirit.

When our Lord was baptized, the Holy Spirit rested upon Him; then, it was passed on to the Apostles, as we heard in today's Gospel when Jesus breathed on them and gave them their commission; and it was fully given on Pentecost.

Second, the witness of the Water.

The flowing waters from the moment Jesus was baptized to the water that flowed from His side on the cross, to the water of our own baptism wherein we die with Christ and are raised with Him to a new life.

And third, the witness of the Blood:

When on the cross the Blood of Jesus was poured out to God in perfect sacrifice, the fulfilling sacrifice that enables us to be living sacrifices, as when we are joined with Him in the Eucharist where we receive the Blood of Christ along with His Body in a continuing witness to the atoning power of His Sacrifice once offered.

The Spirit, the Water, and the Blood come together to form a triple witness to the perfect Messiahship, the perfect Sonship, and the perfect Saviourhood of Jesus Christ.

In breathing upon His Apostles, Christ passed to them the Holy Spirit and commissioned them to witness to the world the Truth that He had revealed to them. Indeed, this witness was given to the Church and to us.

To what do we witness?

We witness to the world the power and love of the Risen Christ. We witness to the Good News, the Gospel.

We witness to the hope of eternal life, not just an eternal existence, but an eternal life in every sense of the word: we will be raised up in spiritual bodies that house our souls and retain our individualities as children of God.

Witness here is active, a verb, an action, not passive as having been a witness to something. It is an action passed from the Apostles to the Church and to us as members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

We witness to the Good News; we proclaim it to the world. Indeed, it is our Christian duty.

How do we witness?

Each of us is called to witness in different ways.

We may witness by telling people about our own spiritual experience as a Christian; we may be called to preach; or write; even just being in His presence in the services of the Church.

But most often, we are called to witness through our lives, by how we live our lives; how we conduct ourselves; just by the way Christ shines forth from us as we reflect His Love and emulate His obedience to the Father.

What better witness than to reflect the joy that comes from accepting God's Grace and Love and letting it flow within us and through us, and act upon our hearts and drive our lives.

The Apostles were first hand witnesses of the Risen Christ to which they witnessed to the world. They were the foundation of the Church which carries on the commission to witness to the world.

As members of the Church, our task is to continue to witness to what we have received: He is risen; our Saviour liveth; Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is our witness, our obligation, not passive but active.

Jesus Christ lives through the Church; He lives in us.

St. John, the beloved Apostle, never ceased in that witness. He bridged the first and second centuries — the last of the Apostles — that we may have his first hand testimony to the risen Christ and the Promise of eternal life.

Now, each of you, led by your very presence before the Altar of God — each of you — what is your commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; what is your commitment in witness to the Resurrected Christ; how much of yourselves are you willing to give in return to what Christ gave to you on the Cross?

The witness of the water and the witness of the Blood — and the witness of the Spirit— those three are irrefutable to which we, too, bear witness.

The world today is in desperate need of our witness, and we are each called in our own special way to witness to Christ, in the best use of our own individual abilities, and in whatever capacity