

3rd Sunday of Eastertide

If someone told you he had seen a spaceship come down - you would be skeptical. If two, three..., then you might start to consider it. If 10 or 20, then you'd have to say there was really something going on.

Law of Moses lays down the precedent: 2 or 3 witnesses establish truth in court.

With the resurrection of Jesus we have not 1, not 2, but 4 different Gospel writers with eyewitnesses as sources. Each attests to this event as valid. Each tells the story from different perspectives and with unique details. In other words, they didn't invent the story, then simply copy it down from one another!

Not just 4 Gospel eyewitness accounts, but 9 out of the 10 writers of the New Testament directly mention Jesus' bodily resurrection, one of which was passionately committed to destroying the Church until the Risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus: St. Paul.

So, we have the eyewitness accounts of the women, the 11 apostles, the whole fellowship of disciples in Jerusalem, the 9 writers of the New Testament, and St. Paul tells us at least 500 others who saw the same Jesus who had been crucified and died, up and walking around before His ascension into the heavens. We have more historical eyewitness proof that Jesus resurrected than we do that many accepted historical persons even existed, like Plato, Socrates, etc.!

In today's story, and all the accounts of encounters with the risen Jesus, He clearly demonstrates to all the disciples gathered that He was not a figment of their imaginations; not some inner spiritual vision, not some dream or mass delusion, but real, letting them touch His body, even eating a fish before them! I remember one of the hymns we sang in my church growing up: "He lives, He lives!... You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!" No! We know he lives because the tomb was empty, as multiple witnesses show, and the dead man is up walking around, walking through walls, and eating fish, for goodness sake!

This once dead, grave defeating, now fish eating Jesus comes back from the dead in order to deliver a present: "peace be with you!", delivering it through their ears and into their very being: the reconciliation with the Father that He won for them on the cross: the forgiveness of sins, giving them the Holy Spirit. A gift that changes everything. A gift that becomes the center of their lives...(Acts or 1 John)

But a gift that is to be shared, because Jesus commissions them as witnesses to the entire world: "*you are witnesses of these things*". The Church lives from being one continual eyewitness in the courtroom of the world to give testimony that "*the Christ suffered and on the third day rose from the dead*". So, we have the hundreds of eyewitnesses who testify to us through the writings of the New Testament, but the witnesses to whom they testified, and those who heard and by hearing encountered the Risen Christ in the Word and in the Sacrament... All the Church is one continuous witnesses - cloud of witnesses - throughout 2,000 years!

These first witnesses all risked everything to speak the truth before the world, giving their lives, which validates the truthfulness of the apostolic witness which comes down to us today through the Church - the communion of witnesses throughout the centuries. You and I are indebted to them, for while Christ's blood purchased your soul from sin, death and the devil, the blood of the faithful witnesses in the Church was the means that the Holy Spirit used to deliver that salvation to you, that you too may be justified, made right with God.

The Holy Spirit still speaks this Word through their mouths and lives, as the Church gives birth to new sons and daughters of God: "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*"

Thanks be to God for the constant flow, that constant chain of faithful witnesses, that the life-giving water of the Gospel may flow to dead, dry souls, and may be brought to life.

You have been brought into the flow as well. Just as Christ appeared to them on that day to deliver "*peace*", so He appeared (and still appears) to you and me in the Ministry of the Word preached - from pulpits, in classrooms, in homes, in coffeehouses, at bedsides and deathbeds - and in the Sacraments administered, where the Risen Christ is miraculously, bodily present, as He was on that day with His disciples.

Just as He gave them a new vocation which was to be the main purpose for their lives after this, so He continues to give to us whom He has reconciled to the Father: to be His witnesses. The whole world is to us a courtroom, and your main

job as a disciple of Jesus is to testify that He has truly risen from the dead, is Lord over all, and in Him there is forgiveness of sins to those who repent and believe. We will do this through words and through deeds, through literally telling the story, and also through serving our neighbors in love.

This is your vocation: to be Christ's witness within your web of relationships. Everything else in life is secondary to this, everything! Most are not witnesses in the same way that a called and ordained pastor is, but everyone of you is to be a witness in your own vocations: family, work, community, and church. (With your own life, work, and words)

How? He equips them with His Holy Spirit and His Word.

First, Just as Christ breathed on them the Holy Spirit, and "*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*", so He does to us today through His Word.. Your vocation is to be a student. You, like the first disciples, are to learn this story well. This means spending time studying! Spending time at our Lord's feet - in Bible study, reading, discussing with other disciples, having the Lord open your minds to understand the Scriptures. How else will you speak this if you don't know it? Many say, "well, I don't think I can tell others about what God has done in Christ", of course, you must be trained for this. No one comes out of his mother's womb trained and ready to be a carpenter or accountant, he must be trained. No one is naturally a witness of Christ, each must be trained. And we start by learning the story, studying, discussing, practicing praying the Word - here the Holy Spirit is busy equipping, even today and even now He's doing that. This, by the way, is not optional, but a commandment, and obligation of every disciple of Christ! A disciple = student, follower, apprentice, pupil.

Second, "*I am sending the promise of my Father upon you...to clothe you with power from on high.*" He has given you the Holy Spirit, and continues to do so, to empower you to do what you cannot do on your own, and ought not to even try: be a witness to Christ. You need the Holy Spirit, must pray for the Holy Spirit, to be clothed with His power, might, understand - the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead!