

EASTER SUNDAY

WITNESS IS ONE WHO “SAW” THE LORD



[Click the picture to go to the video](#)

THE TEXT BELOW IS THE TRANSCRIPTION OF THE VIDEO COMMENTARY BY FR. FERNANDO ARMELLINI

Introduction

The words with which John begins his first letter are moving: *“What we have heard and have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at, and touched with our hands, I mean the Word who is Life...we are telling you of it”* (1 Jn 1:1-3). His is an enviable experience, but unrepeatable. However, to become “witnesses” of Christ, it is not necessary to have walked with Jesus of Nazareth on the roads of Palestine.

Paul—who did not know Jesus before his death and resurrection—is constituted a witness of the things he saw (Acts 26:16) and receives this task directly from the Lord: *“As you have borne witness to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome”* (Acts 23:11).

To be a witness, it’s enough to have seen the Lord really alive, beyond death.

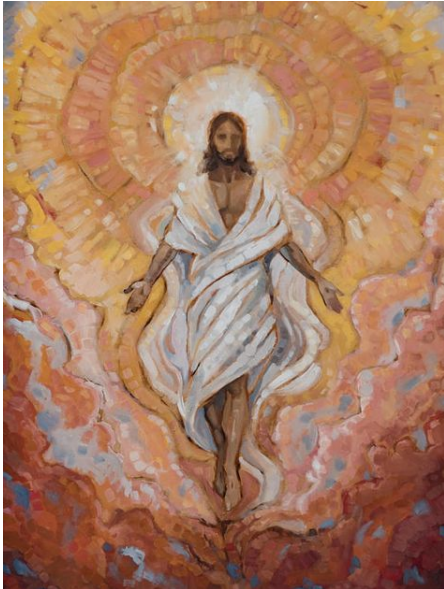
Witnessing is not to give a good example. That is certainly useful, but the testimony is something else. This can only be given by one who passed from death to life; one who can confirm that his existence is changed and acquired meaning when it was illuminated by the light of Easter; one who has the experience that faith in Christ gives meaning to the joys and sorrows and illuminates life’s joyful and sad moments.

Let’s ask ourselves: is Christ’s resurrection a constant point of reference in all the projects we undertake: when we buy, sell, dialogue, divide an inheritance, and choose to have another child? ... Or do we believe that the practical realities of this world have nothing to do with Easter?

Anyone who has seen the risen Lord is changed forever and lives only for him.

To internalize the message, repeat:

“If our heart opens itself to the understanding of the Scriptures, we will see the Lord.”



First Reading: Acts 10:34, 37-43

This reading is taken from the fifth of the eight speeches delivered by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles. The scene takes place in Caesarea, in Cornelius’ house. It is there that he joins a group of pagans who seek to be baptized.

This passage is a valuable piece because, in short, it presents the preaching done in the early Christian communities. By placing it on the lips of Peter, the author intends to confer on it the authority and guarantee of officialdom. Let us see what the main points of this preaching are.

Foremost, it refers to the life of Jesus. *“He went about doing good and healing all who were under the devil’s power, because God was with him”* (v. 38). It also indicated

the place and the time when his activity began. It all began in Galilee after the baptism that John preached (v. 37). That which happened earlier—his childhood and youth spent in Nazareth—stirs our curiosity, but does not constitute a point of reference for our faith.

Peter emphasizes concrete, verifiable, known-to-all facts, because the Christian faith is not based on esoteric ruminations or on a mythological character, but makes reference to a concrete person, who lived in a place and at a precise time. We would expect Peter to at least give a hint also on proclaiming the Good News. Instead, he merely highlights the concrete transformation of the world made—by Jesus. It is enough to prove that a new reality has started.

The second point of the preaching is what people have done: They have not recognized in Jesus the messenger of God. They killed him, nailing him to the cross (v. 39).

And how did God react? Peter said: He could not abandon his “faithful servant” to remain a prisoner of death. For this reason, God raised him to life. His work is opposed to that of the people which brings death, and leads only to the tomb.

God is the one who uplifts and leads to life. This is the fundamental article of our faith (v. 40).

Finally, the mission of the disciples is given: they are witnesses of these things (vv. 39, 41) and are sent to proclaim and testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead (v. 42). This truth is part of the “Creed” and is not a threat, but a happy message. The apostles must tell everyone that Jesus is not a judge who condemns, but the model with which God compares the life of every person, declaring them successes or failures. There is no higher reference point. The Jews cannot invoke their faith in God or the observance of the Law. The points of reference established by God are not the Law, traditions, nor any other human standard, but Jesus and only Jesus.

The apostles are his witnesses because they were with him. They ate and drank with him; they heard his teachings and saw the signs he did. They are not witnesses on account of their

exemplary lives, but because they had a unique experience, they can relate it to anyone who will listen to them with honesty and purity of heart.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

Writing to the Christians of Colossae, Paul reminds them that, on the day of baptism, they were born to a new life, a life, which has its fulfillment not in this world but in the world of God.

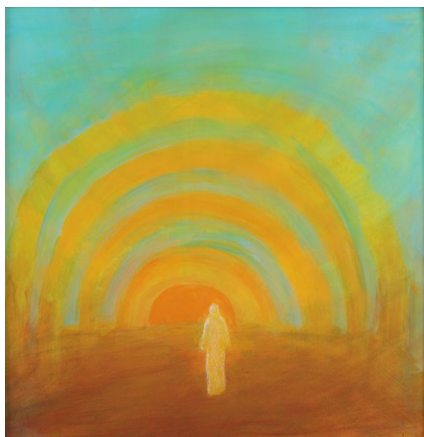
Faith in this new life is what differentiates the believers from the atheists, who are convinced that humans, relying only on their own strength, manage to attain salvation in this world.

It is not difficult to realize that, even if all life's problems are solved where there would be food for all, and pain and disease would be overcome, there will still be unresolved questions in the depths of the human heart: why do I live, and why do I die?

Where do I come from, and where am I going? Only Christ who died and rose from the dead can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Paul does not say that Christians should not concern themselves with the reality of this world. They work and are as committed as others. However, they are not convinced that the fullness of life cannot be reached here (v. 2).

Good works are not wanting—says the reading. They are a manifestation of the new life. They are signs of Jesus' presence. They are like fruits that can sprout and grow only on a living and thriving tree.



Gospel: John 20:1-9

“Now, on the first day after the Sabbath, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark...” (v. 1). In these first words of the Gospel of Easter day one can perceive - almost breathe - the signs of death's victory. On earth, it's all silence, immobility, quietness. A woman, walking quickly alone and frightened, moves in the darkness of the night. Death seems to dominate unchallenged and silence and darkness celebrate the triumph. Power, the principle of force, discrimination, injustice and the yeast of cunning seem to have definitely

overcome the forces of life.

Let's see what happens when Mary sees the empty tomb: the scene changes as if by magic. Caught by a sudden thrill, all the characters are shaken from their slumber and begin to move quickly. *“Mary of Magdala runs to Simon Peter... (who rushes out) with the other disciple... They run together, but the other disciple outruns him...”* (vv. 2-4). Taking everyone by surprise, the day after the Sabbath, life explodes in all its force. God intervened and opened the tomb, but Mary of Magdala does not know it. She thinks that the corpse was stolen - a natural and spontaneous reaction. It is the first thought that crosses the mind of anyone running into an empty tomb.

One can stop at this first discovery, or continue searching for the meaning of what one observes. In the face of death, one can resign, cry, or open the heart to the light from above.

The Magdalene exits the scene momentarily – as if passing the baton, in the race toward faith in Jesus’ words, to two other disciples. One is well known—Peter—the other has no name. It is generally said that it is the evangelist John. But this identification took place much later, about a hundred years after the apostle had died. It may be that it was he, the disciple that Jesus loved. However, in the Gospel of John, this figure certainly has a symbolic character and that should be understood.



This unnamed disciple is always connected in some way to Peter:

– He enters John’s Gospel next to Andrew, when, one day, the two see Jesus passing by, they ask him where he lives. They follow and stay with him all night. What about Peter? He enters because the nameless disciple reaches Jesus before him (Jn 1:35-40).

He enters because this nameless disciple, who had reached Jesus before him, helps convince him “we have found the Messiah” (v. 41).

– This disciple is not mentioned again until the Last Supper when Jesus declares that among the twelve there is also a traitor. Who finds him out? Is it those who can recognize who is on the side of Jesus or who are against him? It’s not Peter but the unnamed disciple who reclines his head on the breast of the Lord (Jn 13:23-26).

– During the passion, Peter stops following and rejects the Master. The unnamed disciple has the courage to follow him into the house of the high priest and is close to Jesus during the mock trial (Jn 18:15-27).

– Peter is not on Calvary. He fled. The disciple whom Jesus loves is instead with the Master. He is at the foot of the cross with Jesus’ mother (Jn 19:25-27).

– Then we arrive at the passage in which Peter is again beaten both in the physical race and in the spiritual one—as we shall see shortly (Jn 20:3-10).

– On the sea of Tiberias, it is still this disciple who recognizes the risen Christ in the man on the shore. Peter realizes it only after the disciple identifies the stranger (Jn 21:7).

– Finally, when he is invited by Jesus to follow him, Peter does not have the courage to do so alone. He feels the need to have at his side “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (Jn 21:20-25).

Who is he then? Why has he no name?



He represents the authentic disciple, the one who just meets Jesus and does not hesitate. He immediately follows him and wants to know him. He even forgets to sleep, just to be with him. Do you know him enough to immediately know who are his friends and enemies? He follows him also when it is necessary to offer his life. He has no name because everyone is invited to insert one’s own name.

We see this pair of disciples run to the tomb. The unnamed disciple arrives first, bends down, sees the linen cloths lying there, but does not enter. Simon Peter also arrives, enters and sees the linen cloths lying flat, and the napkin that was placed on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

Nothing miraculous! There is no appearance of angels; everywhere the signs of death are seen. Perhaps the two disciples have an intuition, the one formulated by John Chrysostom: “Whoever had taken the body would not have stripped it before, nor would they have taken the trouble to remove and roll the napkin and leave it in a place by itself.” His body has therefore not been stolen.

Peter stops, astonished and amazed. He observes but cannot go further. His thoughts are locked before the evidence of death. The unnamed disciple instead takes a step forward: he sees and begins to believe (v. 8). It is the climax moment of his journey of faith in the risen Lord. In front of the signs of death (the grave, the bandages, the shroud...), he begins to perceive the victory of Life.

The following verse unites the two disciples: *“Scripture clearly said that Jesus must rise from the dead, but they had not yet understood that”* (v. 9). It seems illogical, at least as regards the disciple without a name. But, at this point, the evangelist John is not compiling a cold chronicle of events but pointing out to Christians of his community the route through which one comes to faith. It starts from the signs—those documented by the Gospel (Jn 20:30-31). However, they remain mysterious and incomprehensible unless one is guided by the Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures.

The ones who comprehend are those disciples that open their minds and hearts and give space to the interior light that reveals the Risen One. The true disciple does not need further proof; he does not need the verification that Thomas will require.

Jesus said to his disciples: *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much fruit”* (Jn 12:24). Whoever does not believe considers the free gift of Life an absurdity, madness, because beyond this gift one sees only the signs of death. In the light of Easter instead, the authentic disciple “begins to understand” that the life of Jesus given for the brothers introduces one into the bliss of God.

The concluding verse of the episode: The two disciples *“went back home again”* (v. 10) almost gives the impression that everything returns as before. But it is not so. The two have known Jesus; they have witnessed the same facts and saw the same signs. Resuming daily life, one continues discouraged and disappointed, the other however, is guided by new light and supported by new hope.

