

Third Sunday of Easter: Witnesses of the Resurrection

During the season of Lent, much of the focus of the liturgy is on sin and forgiveness. We hear about the many ways that people reject God and sin. We read about the effects of sin upon mankind. And we witness Jesus suffering the effects of our sins. Now, at Easter time, as we celebrate the new life of the Lord, we, perhaps surprisingly, come upon a Sunday when all three readings reflect upon sin. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles tells the leaders of the Jews that Jesus' death and resurrection had been predicted by the prophets. They should now turn toward God so their sins might be wiped away. John in the second reading says that Jesus is our offering for sin, ours and everybody's. Luke in the Gospel gives his account of the first meeting of the Resurrected Lord with the Eleven as concluding with the mandate: In the name of Jesus penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all nations.

The reflections of Easter on sin and penance differ from those of Lent. The focus during Easter is not on the evils of sin but on redemption from sin. With the resurrection of Christ, the world has been transformed. We are no longer mired down by darkness, by evil. The world is being restored to God's original plan. He has given us life. He has conquered sin, which is death, so that we may be united to his Resurrected Life.

There are people in our world who do not know this.

There are people in the world who have heard about Christ, about religion, about forgiveness, but have not been led to an experience of the Lord's forgiveness. These may be the people of the deep, dark night suffering in the world of prostitution, the sex industry or the drug culture. They are exploited so others can become rich. They see their only option in life being to make the best of a terrible situation or end their lives. These people have not witnessed a transformation of life. No one has brought them the witness of the Resurrection.

Perhaps the people in darkness are the people of the lonely home and lonely life. They have worked long and hard to get the most out of the world. Their lives and their houses are full of beautiful things. Now that their dreams have been fulfilled, they realize that they are not happy. They need more to life, but there is nothing left for them to buy. No one has brought them the witness of the Resurrection.

Perhaps the people who have not witnessed the new life of Jesus are those who move from one new experience to another. Commitment is viewed as an antiquated notion, whether it is commitment to other people, to a cause, or even to their own well being. Their lives are continually in flux. Their lives are like a marathon, but one without a finish line. They just keep running and running, mainly running away from themselves. They need someone to give witness to a new way of life, the way of the Lord.

"I am not a ghost," the Lord says in the Gospel. "I am real. The resurrection is

real. There is a new and better way to live. Go tell the world. You are my witnesses.” We are his witnesses to a new and better life, the life of Christ.

I want to tell you about a wonderful lady I once knew named Rosa Muso. She was ninety years old and a resident of a nursing home when, one Easter Sunday, she learned about the death of one of her sons. She came to Mass the Thursday after Easter. She asked me if I would visit her as soon as possible. I made it a point to go to the nursing home the next day. Do you know what she wanted to tell me, this ninety year old lady who was confined to a wheel chair, who grieved over her son's death? She wanted me to know that there was a lady across the hall from her in the nursing home who did not have God in her life. Rosa said to me, "Father, how could she live like that? I talked to her. You need to talk to her." Rosa was a witness to the Resurrection. She was not a theologian, but she understood that life with the Lord is different, transformed. Life without him is meaningless. When confronted with someone living a meaningless life, she, as a Christian, had to do something about it. She had to give witness to God in the world and in her life.

Very few of us are called to deeds of heroic courage in our faith. We are not asked as St. Ignatius of Antioch was to choose between renouncing the faith or being thrown to the wild animals in the Coliseum. But we are all called to be witnesses of the faith. There are so many people whose lives are meaningless because no one has given them witness to the new and better and transformed life of the Lord. They depend on us to give this witness, us, not just in the concept of the Church, but us as each individual reflecting the New Life of the Lord in his or her life.

There are people in the world who will accept your witness to Jesus Christ because they have come to know and respect you. They need you to lead them to God. They need you to lead them from a meaningless life. They need you to be a witness to freedom from darkness and sin, a witness to the New Life, a witness to the Resurrection.

Randy Raus, the president of Life Teen, often tells the story of his conversion. He had not really been raised in any faith. In high school he was attracted to a beautiful girl who he found out was a Catholic deeply involved in her parish. He used this as an opportunity to talk to her and asked her if he could join her at Mass. She said, "Sure," and Randy felt that he was just a small step from dating her. So he went to Mass with her. After Mass they went for ice cream. She asked him, "So what did you think about the Mass?" He didn't have a clue. He was only paying attention to her. But he said, "It was wonderful." She asked, "What part of the homily did you like?" He babbled. She asked, "Did you pay attention to the readings? Do you even remember what the readings were?" He babbled a bit more. He figured, "Well, she's not going to want to see me again." Instead she said, "If you would like to come with me again next week, fine, but this time try." He did go with her the next week. And he did try. And little by little he fell in love with the Lord and with the Catholic faith. He, as you know, eventually became Catholic and went on to be part of the founding of Life Teen. And the girl, did he marry her? No. She didn't become his wife. But she was

his witness to the resurrection.

May we fulfill the mission that Christ gave us when he called us to tell the world that He Lives.