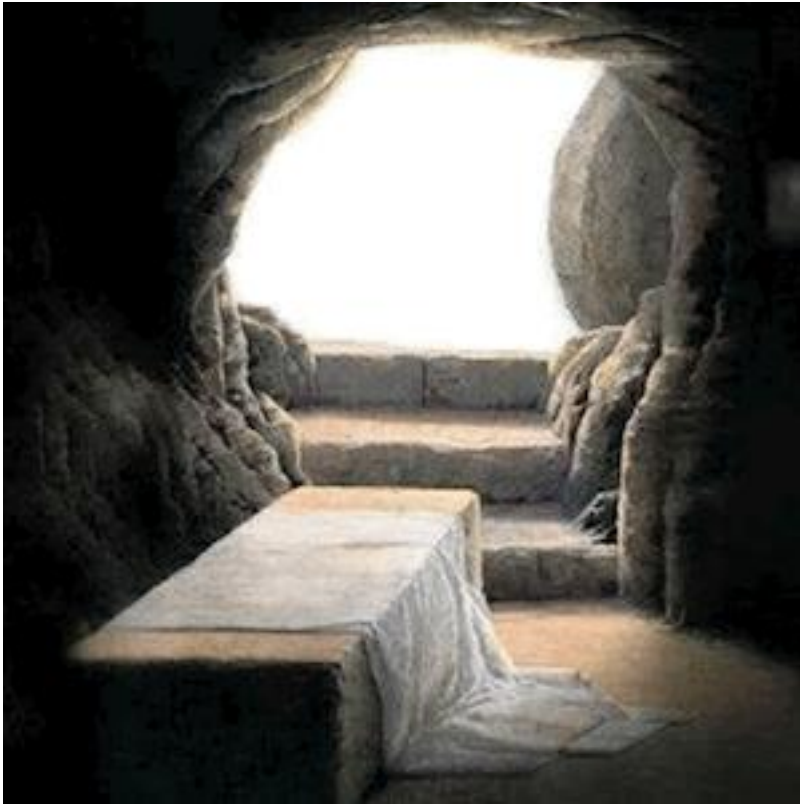


EASTER SUNDAY Commentary on the Readings

Witness is one who “saw” the Lord



Introduction

The words with which John begins his letter are moving: “What we have heard and what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, I mean the Word who is Life... we proclaim also to you” (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 also did not know Jesus personally—is constituted a witness of the things he saw (Acts 26:16) and receives this task from the Lord: “As you have born 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. This 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 made the experience that faith in Christ gives meaning to the joys and sorrows and illuminates the joyful and sad moments.

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

Anyone who has seen the Lord will do nothing more without him.

To internalize the message, repeat:

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

-----1st Reading | 2nd Reading |
Gospel-----

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 are to be baptized.

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

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” (vv. 37-38). It also indicated the place and the time when his activity began. It all began in Galilee after the baptism which John preached. That which happened before—his childhood and youth spent in Nazareth—spurs our curiosity on, 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” prisoner of death. For this, God raised him to life. His work is opposed to that of men, which gives the death, leading 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 man, declaring the success or failure. There is not a higher authority. The Jews cannot invoke their faith in God or the observance of the law. The point 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 made. There are no witnesses for their exemplary life, but they made a unique experience that they can relate 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 man, relying only on one's own strength, manages to attain salvation in this world.

It is not difficult to realize that, even if all the material problems are solved, there would be food for all, pain and disease would be overcome, yet there will still be unresolved questions remaining 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 committed as the others. However, they are 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 his 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, 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 the better over 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 taken to move quickly. "Mary of Magdala runs to Simon Peter ... who rushes out with the other disciple ... They run together, but the other disciple, outrun 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. And it's 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 finding 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 the faith, 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 him, the disciples that Jesus loved. However, in the Gospel of John, this figure certainly has a symbolic character and that should be seized.

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

- He enters the scene next to Andrew. 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).
- This disciple is no longer spoken about until the last supper when Jesus declares that among the twelve there is also a traitor. Who finds him out? Those who can recognize who is on the side of Jesus and who instead is 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 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 process (Jn 18:15-27).
- Peter is not on Calvary. He escaped. The disciple whom Jesus loves is instead with the Master. He is at the foot of the cross with His mother (Jn 19:25-27).
- Then comes the passage in which Peter is again beaten both in the material 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 later (Jn 21:7).
- Finally, when he is invited by Jesus to follow him, Peter does not have the courage to do it 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 that 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, 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 one only sees the signs of death. 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 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 annotation 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 is pointing to the Christians of his community the route through which one comes to faith. It starts from the signs—those documented by the Gospels (Jn 20:30-31). However, they remain mysterious and incomprehensible unless one is guided by the word of God contained in the holy Scriptures. These are those which open the mind and the heart and give the interior light that reveals the Risen One. The true disciple does not need further testing; 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.” Whoever does not believe even considers the free gift of life an absurdity, madness, because behind this gift one only sees the signs of death. In light of Easter instead, the authentic disciple “begins to understand” that the life given for the brothers introduces one in the bliss of God.

The concluding verse of the episode: The two disciples “went back home again” (v. 10). It 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 the daily life, one continues discouraged and disappointed, and the other is guided by a new light and supported by a new hope.

- See more at: <http://www.bibleclaret.org/celebrating-the-word-of-god#sthash.kuyZyLkh.dpuf>

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