

Third Sunday of Easter, B

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Psalm 4

1 John 2:1-5

Luke 24:35-48

In our first reading we heard: “God raised (Christ) from the dead, and to that fact we are the witnesses.” And our Gospel we heard: “So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.”

We are witnesses of these things. A “witness” is one of the most important titles that was given to the first Christians, and which continues to be given to us. Witnesses testify to what they have seen and what they have heard.

St John’s Gospel and letters speak often of the testimony of both Christ himself and of his followers. Jesus tells his followers that he testifies to the truth, that he testifies to the will of the Father, to what he has seen and heard. And those who follow him, Jesus taught, continue this same activity – they are witnesses, they testify to what they have seen and heard, they testify to the truth.

In ancient Greek the word for testimony and the word for witness have the same origin: *martyrion*. Of course “martyr” has now come to mean one who gives their life for the faith, but the origin of the word was not so specific or so bloody – it meant one who gives testimony, one who is a witness to the faith.

And after the empty tomb, after the road to Emmaus, Jesus begins to make clear to his disciples—and therefore to us—that we are to be these martyrs, these witnesses. Most of us will not be called to offer the witness of the martyrs to the point of shedding our blood, but we are all called to the same faithfulness in our witness.

Such testimony to the peace and truth of the Good News must continue in every age, in every place, until the Lord’s return – and in so doing we continue the very testimony of Christ himself about God’s loving plan of salvation. And we are called to be witnesses not just to ideas about Christ, but first-and-foremost to his love – to embody in our lives, in our choices, in our actions, in our words, a clear testimony to God’s life and love within us – a clear testimony to the risen Christ whose salvation has transformed and redeemed us, and which continues to redeem.

How easy it can be to forget that being Christian is not just a private thing between us and God. Others will often know that we are followers of Christ, and they notice how it affects our lives. Being a Christian is a public stance, regardless how widely we make it known. The world looks at us, and in a certain sense, all of us are in the court

of public opinion. Now of course, the eyes of God are far more important than the eyes of others, but it remains that our life of faith has public consequences.

I certainly know for myself, being publicly identifiable as a priest makes me think twice before I start speeding around or cutting someone off in traffic. Or when someone asks me for a favour. Or if I'm tempted to get some expensive thing I don't really need. It's a bit of an accountability check: "Wait, I'm a priest, I better think about the witness I'm giving here."

It's perhaps a bit like a wedding ring for those of you who are married – if someone cute of the opposite sex walks by, you might be tempted to check them out for a moment, but then you think, "Hang on, I better not."

But regardless of whether we have some external identifier of our faith or not, this should be something we all say to ourselves on a regular basis: "Wait, I'm a Christian, I'm a Catholic, what kind of witness am I giving here?" Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, we represent Christ in our world. We are his witnesses. And we testify to the truth of his teaching by the way we live our lives.

Quick story: in my first year of seminary, we went to Whitfords parish to celebrate the Easter Vigil, and afterwards we joined the parishioners for a light supper in the parish hall. At one point I was sharing some banter with a couple of older children, which on the surface was not too different from the kind of interactions I regularly had in some of my past jobs (e.g. hosting birthday parties, or working at Scitech). But afterwards, I could tell that it was a bit more than that. They were old enough to know that I was a seminarian and what that meant, and on some level, I sensed that our fun interaction had resulted in their notion of the Church—and perhaps even their notion of God—receiving a positive boost.

As I thought about this afterwards, I found it a little bit daunting. This was a significant amount of power to have, and it was also a significant responsibility. What if I was having a bad day, and I gave someone a nasty look – their sense of the Church or even of God could potentially be damaged by that. So pray for soon-to-be Father Errol, as he gets used to the new level of responsibility he is about to assume with his priestly ordination on Friday.

But this is not just about us clergy and religious – all the faithful are called to be witnesses to Christ in all aspects of our lives. When we do good, it is not only for our own salvation or our own benefit. It is also testimony – it is a witness to our faith and to the life of Christ that dwells within us. And when we fail to do good, we not only potentially damage our relationship with God, we also become false witnesses, and on some level we may compromise the credibility of the Gospel in our world.

It is humbling and sobering to realise that much of the credibility of Christ's teaching rests on our witness. He has chosen us, he has sent us here, to Armadale, Western Australia, to be his witnesses – to testify through our lives and our choices to the truth

of God's redemption and salvation at work in the world.

May God help us to be good and faithful witnesses. Not just within these walls, where it is fairly easy, but in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, and in our community. May we be God's hands and feet in our world that, deep-down, yearns for the Good News of Christ, that secretly wants to believe that redemption is possible, but that needs faithful witnesses in order to be convinced of this truth.

Of course, we can't give what we don't have – and so we gather around our Lord's altar today, both to give him the praise that is his due, and also to be renewed in spirit and in body, by the gift of Christ's Body, so that we may become ever more his Body, for the salvation of the world.