

May 21, 2023

Exaudi

Text: John 15:26-16:4a; 1 Peter 4:7-14

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Though this is the last Sunday of the Easter season, and so the last Sunday we'll start and end the sermon like that, the proclamation that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead remains the Church's constant proclamation. This truth, and everything tied up in it, is what we are called to bear witness to by Christ in our Gospel text.

As He says to His disciples, "You also will bear witness." That's not only for those gathered in the upper room. That's for you. "You also will bear witness." Travis, Jess, you will bear witness. Every single baptized Christian in this room, every one of you, you also will bear witness.

You bear witness because that's what Christians do. And it's not a grudging, forced sort of action, though your sinful flesh will certainly fight against it.

No, you'll bear witness because in your Baptism, God the Holy Spirit came to dwell in you, just as St. Peter describes in his great Pentecost sermon, and this Spirit of Truth bears witness about Jesus. That's what He does.

Through you, the Spirit shines forth the light of the Word into the world. That's what we illustrate in the Baptismal rite with the giving of the Baptismal candle, that all who are baptized receive the light of God and shine that light forth for all to see.

And what a light it is that you're given to shine forth! By the Holy Spirit working through you, you get to share wonderful, life-changing truths!

You get to tell others that they, from when they were infants, even from the moment they were conceived and no one knew they existed except God Himself, that they are the unique creations of a loving God and are treasured by Him.

You get to tell people who are trying to figure out their place in life and what gives life meaning that the God who created them did so for a reason and that He put them on this planet for a purpose and that He desires to share His incredible peace and joy and love with them for eternity.

You get to share with those lost and hurting and confused in this world that the God of truth desires to bring them into the truth, to cleanse them of their filth, to bind up their wounds and drive away their fears.

You get to bear witness to anyone you come across that God loved them so much that He sent His Son to pay the price for their sins and win for them eternal life – anyone, because it's true for everyone. That is the light which the Holy Spirit uses you to shine forth. That is the witness you get to bear.

For such a wonderful truth to bear witness to, for such a great light to shine, you'd think that it would be well-received. Who wouldn't want to hear that they are loved, that they have purpose, that they are cared for?

Sadly, I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know when I say that such witness isn't well-received much of the time. As St. John writes at the beginning of his Gospel – and remember, this is the Holy Spirit speaking through John – he says, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.”

The light bringing light to all, and it's refused. Why? Jesus gives us the reason when later on in the Gospel He says this: “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”

The light of the Gospel is opposed because people, by their sinful nature, love darkness. The Word that you are called to bear witness to is the Truth, the Truth that sets people free, and people don't want to hear that because it must mean that apart from the Truth, they are enslaved.

If they know neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Spirit of Truth, then they are lost in darkness. They are enslaved to evil. This is why, as Jesus points out, people can do such things as kill the innocent and believe, truly believe, that they are doing good.

This darkness is something that the world will not only seek to remain in, but also that it will tempt you who bear the light back into.

Travis, Jess, the world will tell you to break the promises you made today in Kimber's Baptism. It will tell you that your child's earthly happiness is more important than her being raised in the Truth, than her being brought up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The world will offer up all sorts of idols to try to distract you from your divinely-given role as father and mother.

And this is true for every Christian. All of you are continually tempted in one form or another to deny the truth, or at least keep it to yourself for Sunday mornings and live the other six and a half days of the week like the rest of the world. Don't rock the boat; go along with the lies; bear false witness so that everyone stays happy.

The reason Satan does this is that if you follow along enough, it will eventually start to change what you believe. What you practice, what you preach, that will work its way into your heart. And so, you must bear witness to the Truth.

It will not be easy. In fact, it will be hard, and will only get harder as this world and this nation seem to plunge headlong further and further into darkness. As St. Peter exhorts in the Epistle reading, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

It's not strange, because it's exactly what Jesus said would happen. Right before where the Gospel reading starts in, Jesus tells His disciples this: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Travis and Jess, the world will hate you when you will not let it fill your kids' heads with lies, or when you affirm that your children's eternal well-being takes precedence over anything else in their lives.

The world will hate Christians when they dare to point out the devil's lies at work in the world, and when Christians proclaim that God and His Word stand above any earthly power or authority. You will all face the world's displeasure and mockery and even outright hatred for bearing witness to Christ in your words, your deeds, your lives.

And this won't come just in general, some sort of impersonal, abstract hatred. It will come from real people in your lives. Coworkers. Neighbors. Classmates. Friends. Family. That's what makes it so hard. That's what makes the temptation to fall away so strong.

As strong as this temptation is, though, you have something stronger. Jesus said, "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." You have the Word of Jesus, the Word of God, the Word of Truth to keep you from falling.

You have the sword of the Spirit which Satan fears so much because its truth exposes all of his lies. You have the promises of God, promises so strong and unbreakable that even though heaven and earth will pass away, these promises will never pass away. You have the Word through which the light shines and the darkness is not able to overcome it.

In the Word you have words of comfort and assurance and hope. When the challenges of being a faithful Christian father and mother come up and you're not sure how you're going to handle everything that's being thrown at you, then hear God speak to you in His Word.

He knows what it's like to be the Father of children who don't always listen. He knows what it's like to be exhausted while striving to care for His people. He knows the patience required to teach, to discipline, to love. In His Word, He promises to give those things needed to those who ask.

When the challenges of living in a sin-filled world confront you, then hear God speak to you in His Word.

He knows very well what it's like to be rejected for being faithful. He is the One who gives you purpose and meaning which go far beyond this world's empty praise. He has promised eternal blessings that are infinitely better than the shallow pleasures of this life. He gives you the Truth in this age of anti-Truth.

When this world would throw you out of its synagogues, out of its social circles, out of your places of employment, because you stand for Truth and will not live by the devil's lies, then hear God speak to you in His Word.

He has promised to give you your daily bread, to care for you even more than He does the birds of the heavens or the flowers of the field. He has promised to protect you, that not even a single hair will fall from your head apart from His allowing it. He has promised that when you die, you will live, because in your Baptism you have been joined to His death and resurrection, and as He lives and reigns to all eternity, so too will you live with Him into eternity.

You will bear witness, and though the world and its prince may rage and howl, they can't do anything to you unless the Lord allows it, and whatever He does allow them to do He will turn to your good.

This can all be a hard thing to grasp, which is why, in addition to the Word of Truth, you are also given the very Spirit of Truth. You are not alone in this fight against the powers of darkness. God the Holy Spirit dwells in you, making you His temple. He is the Spirit which sends all the unclean spirits reeling, fleeing back into the abyss.

You don't have to worry about trying to kindle your own light to shine in the darkness, because the Spirit shows for His own divine light, using the Word as oil for your lamp.

You don't have to worry about presenting the truth in the most persuasive, eloquent way for it to work. The Spirit of Truth is the power behind it, such that even small children can proclaim the Gospel and have it contain the power of God unto salvation.

When the hour comes for you to bear witness, then don't worry, because Jesus has said these things to you so that "you may remember that I told them to you."

When you have those mornings that are just rough and you'd rather skip the family devotions, the Spirit will strengthen you, that you might be the ones through which He will tell His Word to your children.

When you are presented with all sorts of temptations that "are the just way the world is" and "that everyone is doing," then the Spirit will remind you that you don't belong to the world, you belong to Christ.

When the fiery trials come and you suffer and are insulted for the name of Christ, then may the Spirit recall the Word of Truth to you, that "you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." To this, the Spirit bears witness. Go therefore, and bear witness to that glorious truth which the Church will always proclaim:

"Alleluia! Christ is risen!"