

Third Sunday of Easter Year B

Acts 3:13-15,17-19: Psalm 4:2,4,7,9: 1 John 2:1-5: Luke 24:35-48

“you are witnesses to this” Luke 24:48

Jesus commissions the apostles to be witnesses to his Resurrection. They can see for themselves that he is risen: he is transfigured in some way but truly Jesus whom they walked and talked with before his death. By eating with them he assures them that he is not a spirit or a ghost but is truly present in body. He opens their minds to understand that he is the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

In commissioning the Apostles and disciples to be witnesses, Jesus tells us that faith is not just a matter between oneself and God; it is not private, but it is personal. To be a witness is not just to be an eye witness, to recall that one saw him risen and to believe in him with one's heart and mind, but it is to publicly proclaim him as Lord. Peter understands this commission. He takes the risk and speaks the truth that Jesus who was crucified is risen. He knew that proclaiming Jesus in the Temple will have its consequences as it did for Jesus. Peter however understands that faith is not private but is proclaimed in the public space. To witness to Jesus is to imitate him in his actions as well as in his words. Witnessing to Jesus is expressed not only in one's home and Church but in the cultural, economic and social society in which we live.

We often refer today about 'public' and 'private' in terms of health and housing. However, another negative consequence of Covid -19 has been the misuse of the term 'private worship'. With this, primary worship of God is being allocated to and misplaced in the private realm. For example, we often read notices 'that the funeral is private'. However, this is not the nature of Mass and the other Sacraments, or the entire Liturgy of the Church, which includes funerals. The Sacraments are public celebrations even if they are behind closed doors. Celebrating Sacraments, receiving Sacraments are a public manifestation of our faith; it is the proclamation of faith. Mass is always public. To receive Baptism, to celebrate Mass and receive Holy Communion is a public witness to Jesus. While we have a personal relationship with the Lord, our expression of faith is not a private matter. Our faith is lived in our daily interaction, in our cultural, economic and social activities. The concern today of using the word 'private' for Funeral Masses gives rise to a notion that the Liturgy is a private matter, that the Worship of God is a private celebration.

Saint Peter publicly expresses his faith in the Risen Jesus through his proclamation as we find in the Acts of the Apostles. We, too, witness to Jesus risen from the dead through our words, actions and worship. Ultimately, we do this through our participation in the celebration of the Liturgy. Even for the ordained priest, these are not solo, private undertakings. Indeed, the Church teaches that in every celebration of Mass there ought to be another person participating with the priest (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 254).

The Liturgy is the public worship of the Church; it is not a private celebration. This is made very clear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says.

“The word "liturgy" originally meant a "public work" or a "service in the name of/on behalf of the people." In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in "the work of God."” **1069**

*“In the New Testament the word "liturgy" refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity.”*⁶

The liturgy then is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. ... In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members. **1070**

“You are witnesses to this.”

May our witness to Jesus Christ risen from the dead follow the example of Saint Peter who proclaimed Christ openly and publicly.

Fr. Patrick Winkler