



From A Bishop's Journal (635)

Believable Witnesses

Level IV of the family- and parish-based catechetics programme urges me to further deepen my understanding of the one who said: "I am with you always, even to the end of time." I can discover him further by listening to the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and believing the testimony of Christ's disciples and the communities that claim allegiance to him.

Truthful Witnesses

The Gospels were written many years after Jesus' death, that is, they were written between the years 70 and 80. They tell us of the life of Jesus, and they are first and foremost catechetical instructions that made the rounds of the first Christian communities. Saint Matthew addresses himself especially to Jews newly-converted to Jesus' message: the Holy Scriptures have been fulfilled in Christ. Saint Mark reveals the gradually unfolding great mystery of Christ. Saint Luke, after scrupulously searching through all the information available, introduces us to Jesus in his mystery of kindness and mercy. As for Saint John, he shows Jesus as the one sent by the Father, come to witness to all what he has learned from Him. At the conclusion of his Gospel, Saint John writes: "Jesus performed many other signs as well – signs not recorded here – in the presence of his disciples. But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God..." We were then a long way from having daily electronic or televised media, and far from the internet: it was from "mouth to ear" that messages were transmitted, but hearing Jesus in person was the privilege of these men and women of faith. For proof of this we need only recall the professions of faith of Peter, Martha and Mary, the Good Thief, and Mary Magdalen.

An Exceptional Letter

The Apostle John, who was Jesus' intimate witness at the transfiguration on Mount Thabor, at the crucifixion on Calvary, and then on Easter evening, does not hesitate to write the following to the first Christians: "This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched – we speak of the word of life... we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us. This fellowship of ours is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Indeed, the purpose in writing you this is that our joy may be complete." These words have been the inspiration of many writings and songs. They were the inspiration of Robert Lebel's theme song for the 2002 World Youth Day

in Toronto, “Light of the World.” The [French] editor Alpec published one of my songs, “Le Verbe de Dieu,” [“The Word of God”] in their new selection of religious songs. Many religious writings have seriously studied this doctrine of the incarnate Word.

The Holy Spirit at Work

It is good to read the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, especially those about his coming departure in order to allow the Holy Spirit to come to his disciples who were shocked to hear him say: “It is much better for you that I go. When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father – and whom I myself will send from the Father – he will bear witness on my behalf...” The Holy Spirit is really the Memory of Jesus. He [the Holy Spirit] brought to the memory of the first disciples the words and actions of Jesus. Through family- and parish-based catechetics, through the life witness of our people and families, through all our joyful celebrations of the 2006 Lenten season which is meant to be a “revelation of Jesus,” “God present among us,” the Spirit continues today to remind us of Jesus’ words and deeds.

Who Is Jesus?

For your benefit, young people and parents, and you readers of this reflection I offer you, I would like to quote a few excerpts from Pope Paul VI’s homily that he gave in Manilla on November 29, 1970. The Pope, who had recently attended Vatican Council II, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had these words to say about the Memory of Jesus: “ ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! ’ (I Cor. 9:16). I am sent by him, by Christ himself, to do this. I am an apostle, I am a witness, the more distant the goal, the more difficult my mission, the more pressing is the love that urges me to it. I must bear witness to his name: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He reveals the invisible God, he is the firstborn of all creation, the foundation of everything created. He is the Teacher of mankind, and its Redeemer. He was born, he died and rose again for us. He is the centre of history and of the world, he is the one who knows us and who loves us, he is the companion and the friend of our life. He is the man of sorrows and of hope. It is he who will come and who one day will be our judge and – we hope – the everlasting fullness of our existence, our happiness.”

The Path to Happiness

“I could never finish speaking about him: he is the light and the truth; indeed, he is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn. 14:6). He is the bread and the spring of living water to satisfy our hunger and our thirst. He is our shepherd, our guide, our model, our comfort, our brother. Like us, and more than us, he has been little, poor, humiliated, he has been a worker, he has known misfortune and been patient. For our sake he spoke, worked miracles and founded a new kingdom where the poor are happy, where peace is the principle for living together, where the pure of heart and those who mourn are raised up and comforted, where those who hunger and thirst after justice have their fill, where sinners can be forgiven, where all are brothers.”

Discovering Jesus

The Pope continued: “Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega; he is the king of the new world; he is the secret of history; he is the key to our destiny. He is the mediator, the bridge, between heaven and earth. He is more perfect than anyone else, the Son of Man, because he is the Son of God, eternal and infinite. He is the son of Mary, blessed among all women, his mother according to the flesh, and our mother through the sharing in the Spirit of his Mystical Body.”

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