

Sermon for the Sunday after the Ascension
St. Joseph Parish

June 1, 2025
Father Herb

We wax a trifle evangelical this morning. Last Sunday, Ascension Day, and this morning we have heard the voices of Our Lord in John's gospel, in St. James and St. Peter's letters about "bearing witness" once the Holy Ghost is come upon us next Sunday. We have time between now and then to ponder what it is we are to make of His arrival and..with joy.. to anticipate what it is He will nudge or startle, and then empower each of us to do.

Several among us speak of how alive and freed up they feel when they go out of this church on Sunday mornings. Who's responsible?...the same Spirit that moves us to get out of bed and to come into this church to worship...The Holy Ghost. But like the apostles watching Jesus ascend, and we as disciples, we are not to stand idly by gazing into space in thanks and wonder for very long. Jesus by the very same Spirit has given us the task of bearing witness to do. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth".

What does the scripture mean.. to "bear witness "to our Lord? Simply this: To confess one's convictions. Confess your convictions about Him ..and not only in word, but in action. In the gospel reading, St. John helps us gather our convictions around one idea: companionship. Jesus has been companion to the disciples and apostles; they have been His companions. Companions especially in his Passion..even as they slept during his agony, and John, at least, witnessed Jesus' crucifixion with Mary and the holy women. They had to be his companions to be able to come to terms with their Master's empty tomb, and to confess the truth about his post-resurrection companionship with conviction to other disciples. Indeed, there were the multiple times our resurrected Lord spoke to the apostles, as on the road to Emmaus, or ate bread and roasted fish with him on a

Galilean beach. Moved to remain their companion, Jesus took his apostles up the Mount of Olives to be with them before He departed, so as to eyewitness the Ascension, this companionship to last for as many moments as the Father had appointed.

To bear witness to Him whom others do not know as we do, one has to be convinced of the story of Jesus to confess those convictions..and one also can authentically confess that Jesus' life experience is reflected in one's own life experience. What do I mean? Has Jesus been your companion in the agonies you've borne alone? bear witness to the truth; Has He rescued you from near death experiences? bear witness to the truth; has He been your companion and lifted you or the anyone you hold dear up ..out of the depth of suicidal despair, out of addiction into recovery? bear witness to the truth. Has not his holy spirit been the motivating power for your mind to ascend in prayer and study of His words, and for your heart to burn with love for God?

Jesus says in the gospel of John, "the Holy Ghost shall 'testify' of me, and ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning." Yes, the disciples were. So have we..not from the beginning of his ministry, but from our baptisms, from the inception of our lives as Christians.

Waxing evangelical and Pentecostal both, What I love to recall after conversion in the southland is hearing and speaking and singing that word, "TESTIFY"..people confessing their convictions and convincing others in the Spirit...Not exactly Anglo-Catholic comportment..but if we leave this house of God with faces that shine with hope and good cheer..the Holy Ghost has been with us..in solemn and reverent worship, we have been testifying to the truth about our Lord.

About confessing one's convictions in action and thereby also bearing witness to Jesus: just as we confessed them by speaking, St. James said on Rogation Sunday, we are called to confess them BY ACTION true to Jesus. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

St. Peter chimes in for our time: these things, too, bear witness to what Jesus said and did: "The end of all things is at hand. Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer..have fervent charity among yourselves..use hospitality to one another..as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Companionship with Jesus cannot help but extend to companionship of a similar sort with others who witness His actions in ours. We can speak like the disciples who bore witness to Jesus' Passion, his Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension from the parallels God has given us in our own lives.

Speaking and acting out our convictions that Jesus is Lord could look like this: Not so much to wax eloquently on the Passion of our Lord, as to be witnessed by others bearing the crosses they know we carry as selflessly and devotedly as Jesus did .. Not to wag our tongues at the cost of the Son's crucifixion to His Father, but to loose them in praise of Jesus dying for our sins..we the undeserving. Such praise is a confession of our conviction..and it can convince the many burdened by sin, who fear they are likewise undeserving, to stand with us at the foot of the Cross. And not to speak offhandedly about the Resurrection, but to be seen by those who see us living a new life Jesus' sacrificial love gave into our hands.. So that an old lost schoolmate is moved to ask, What has changed you so? And not so much to take to heart and mind the Ascension as one that will be ours and to stare up in the skies ceaselessly for Our Lord's return for us, but to bear one's heart and mind for the sake of lifting up the lives of those less fortunate in faith than ourselves.

Testify!