



Living Witness

A living witness is one whose life is dedicated to God. From the commitment joyfully undertaken at baptism issues a quality of life different from that of people still in bondage to sin. With the heart we believe the Gospel, with the lips we confess our convictions, and by our lives we demonstrate our faith, to God and to man. It cannot be otherwise if we are to be true to our calling. If we love God, then we must express that love not merely in word or in speech, which anybody could do, but in deed and in truth. (See 1 John 3:18).

The commission of the risen, all-powerful Lord to his disciples made demands upon them which they could only discharge in word and in deed. “You shall be my witnesses”, he commanded, ‘in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth’” (Acts 1:8). More precisely he called upon them, and calls upon us, to be “my martyrs” for this is the ultimate meaning of the Greek word used. And many of those who confessed their convictions with their lips sealed the confession with their lives. After persistent and constant witness they were prepared to surrender their mortal lives in certain hope of life everlasting.

We Surrender Our Freedom

Every brother and sister, young or old, is expected to be an eager, enthusiastic witness to the love, grace and truth of God, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, and the coming Kingdom of God on earth. Undoubtedly this means the surrender of our freedom to live our lives as we might wish. Paul exhorted all Christ’s followers: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (rational or intelligent) service” (Romans 12:1 AV).

The decision whether we actively witness to our faith or whether we hold back, or abstain, is not ours to make. Paul was blunt about this: “You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20)* (* Quotations are from the RSV). This figure that Paul used was of Jesus going to the market place to ‘buy’ with his life, those who were slaves (to sin) so that they could become **His** slaves, or servants. We **believe** what Paul said, but can we witness to this by translating our belief into **deeds**?

We have dared to hope that we may enter a life which will be glorified by eternal

fellowship with the Father and Son; so could we really expect to be able to choose the way we live and witness to suit our personal convenience?

This year of dedication is a call to each of us to rouse us out of the apathy that may be present in our individual and ecclesial lives. It would be so easy to sink into the state of the ecclesia in Sardis, to whom Jesus said: “I know your works; you have the **name** of being alive, and you are **dead**. Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God” (Rev 3:1-2).

Jesus still moves among the ecclesias and knows our works. His parable of the wise and foolish virgins, **all** of whom slumbered and slept in the hour before the Bridegroom’s coming, still warns us to “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt 25:13). We best watch by witnessing in our daily lives, to the certainty of the coming of Jesus.

We Must Work With Heaven

In our preoccupation with the problems of life it may be difficult to visualise the close co-operation that the Father, Son and angels desire with the saints on earth—but it is nonetheless **real**. It is this spiritual reality that should give us the strength to be active and truly living witnesses to our faith and hope.

Heaven witnessed to this co-operation when John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him and was told: “You must not do that! I am a **fellow-servant** with you and your brethren the prophets, **and with those who keep the word of this book**” (Rev 22:9).

So we are not alone, even as a community, for we work with the hosts of heaven to achieve the Father’s purposes through His Son. And lest we feel overwhelmed and weak in facing the responsibilities of faithful obedience and witness we are told that the angels are “Ministering spirits sent forth to **serve**, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (Heb 1:14). This is the immeasurable glory and honour of having been called by the Father to His service and witness!

Our witness does not depend wholly on the breadth of our knowledge of Scripture, although the more we know the deeper becomes our understanding and knowledge of God. (See Jer 9:23-24). It rather depends on developing our love and compassion towards others, so that we are ready to help and comfort people, as well as proclaiming to them the word of the Gospel.

We Witness Through Our Deeds

Often it is the **way** we live that strongly witnesses to our faith. The old sister, who for many years and in all weathers, had walked down a street to a bus stop in order to attend her ecclesial meetings on Sundays, never realised that for some time a curious husband and wife had wondered at the reason for her regularity. Finally their curiosity had to be satisfied and they stopped her to discover the reason; and they too were added to the Household of Faith.

Even the way we face suffering is its own witness. The young brother, who was dying of an incurable disease never knew that his unconquerable enthusiasm and witness to his faith, in a hospital ward, after his death brought his father, mother and a friend into the House of God.

A great deal of effort and money can be expended on a 'Special Effort' and when it is over an ecclesia can return to the regular routine of meetings with little other sign of living witness. But once, a young sister felt that this was not enough: she wanted to continue her effort in the streets where she had distributed pamphlets.

With the help of additional pamphlets provided by the ecclesia, she persisted, with the result that a young married couple were added to the Faith! If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well —and is there anything better on this vast earth of ours than to witness for the truth?

These examples show us that being living members of the Household of Faith is far more than simply believing the right things and attending the meetings regularly. Our divine call is meant to be a spiritually dominated one which transforms our lives. It is meant to be creatively **active** so that something unique develops in the life of every saint.

We Must Beautify The Word

How many of us realise that something beautiful can happen when we study the Scriptures? When Paul exhorted older and younger men and women to lead lives pleasing to God, he added: "So that in everything they may **adorn** (Greek, kosmeo, beautify) the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Titus 2:10).

Further, how many of us recognise that something profound can happen when we attend the Memorial Service? For if it blesses us with its refreshment, comfort and promise, we can bless it with the 'spiritual sacrifices' we bring to it as the result of our living witness during the past week. This is how Paul referred to this reciprocal blessing: "The cup of blessing **which we bless**, is it not the participation (sharing) in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).

If we have truly been with Jesus, we shall not only **believe**, but we shall actively live, **in deed**, the principle by which he lived: "If any man would come after me, let him **deny himself**, take up **his cross** and **follow me**" (Matt 16:24). This is not something we do once and for all at baptism, for to any who would follow Him —and thus to all of us who strive to do so—He bids us bear the cross 'daily' (Luke 9:23).

The word 'deny' is an absolute one in the Greek; it means to deny oneself completely in order that we may affirm **in our lives** the will of God and of Jesus. It was the apostle Paul, self-styled imitator of Jesus, who suffered the loss of **all** things and counted them as refuse that he might gain Christ (Phil. 3: 7-8).

The cross that we are expected to carry is not just bearing the sicknesses and hazards of life which all, in or out of the Truth, may suffer; it is the ever present possibility that we may suffer loss as the result of affirming the will of God and of being a disciple of Christ. In the Roman world of the first century, a man carrying a cross was

about to die. “I die daily”, said Paul (1 Cor 15:31); “I have been crucified with Christ... who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The word ‘follow’ was used of a soldier following his commander with absolute obedience, or of a slave attending to the wishes and needs of his master without questioning his orders; or of a disciple unswervingly accepting and obeying the wisdom of his teacher. We are called as soldiers in the army of the Lord, slaves in the household of faith, disciples learning at the feet of Jesus. But if we are living witnesses, showing by our deeds our love of the truth, then we are all of these things and yet more. We are friends of Jesus, and He of us.

Each of these three words tests the quality of our witness, but whilst we are called upon to become disciples of Jesus without any personal reservations, it is not without reward: “Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has **stood the test**, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

How We Fulfil The Law Of God

All God’s purposes have been made possible through His love of the world; all Christ’s sufferings were triumphantly met through his love for men and women; and all our trials and our witnesses will be made perfect if we love with the deep, compassionate pity for others that the Father and Son manifested, for “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

To sum up... we become living witnesses not only because we are so commanded, but because:

- ❖ God first loved us, therefore like Israel we should love our brethren, and strangers in our midst (Lev 19:34 and 1 John 4:10).
- ❖ We have received the gift of God’s grace; therefore we must abound in this grace to others (2 Cor 8:7).
- ❖ God has forgiven us our sins; therefore we should forgive those who sin against us and witness to this divine saving grace (Matt 6:14-15 and Romans 6:23).
- ❖ Jesus laid down his life for us; so we ought to be prepared to lay down our lives for the brethren and sisters. And this **spirit** of self-sacrifice should be a witness to all (1 John 3:16).
- ❖ God cares for us and accepts the burden of our anxieties if we humbly take them to Him; therefore we ought to accept a share of the burdens of others, for this is an important part of our witness (1 Peter 5:6; 1 Cor 12:25-27 and Gal 6:9-10).
- ❖ We have received the word of the Truth which has made us free; so we should witness to others, the power of this word in our hearts and minds (2 Tim 4:2 and 1 Cor 9:16).
- ❖ We have received the assurance of resurrection from the dead and the Kingdom to

come; therefore we should joyfully prepare for, and witness to others the glory of these promises (1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Tim 4:1 and Heb 11:39-40; 12:1-2).

With all the foregoing exhortation from Scripture how should we witness to the marvellous benefits of the Gospel?

- ❖ As members of the House of God we should cooperate in any way we can with its efforts to proclaim the Truth. And visitors to our meetings should be received warmly and helpfully by all.
- ❖ Among our neighbours, shopkeepers and employers we should be known not only as lovers of God, of one another, and of all around us, but as cheerful, honest, reliable and helpful.
- ❖ In our homes we should be ready to invite any around to join us in Bible Reading and in any discussion thus induced. Whenever the opportunity allows, we should give God thanks for the blessings from His hand.
- ❖ If it be that we are confined to bed with sickness or disease, we can witness, even in our pain and suffering, by a cheerfulness and joy which allows a complete trust in God's care for us in the present and His glory for us in the future.
- ❖ In all our relationships with others it should be **seen** at all times that we are followers of the Lord Jesus in Truth, in love, in **deed**, and in our patient waiting for His coming.
- ❖ It was Jesus who exhorted: "Let **your light** so shine before men that they may **see** your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16).
- ❖ So to your dedication and witness, my brothers and sisters!

CALS

Printed by Peerless Press Ltd, Spon Lane, West Bromwich