

When I attend Church, my longing is to hear about Jesus, to worship Jesus and to come away with the sense of having encountered Jesus during the experience. I need to be reminded of His love and of His forgiveness of my sins, which are like the grains of sand in the desert. And that's a fairly regular part of my own preaching, because I assume others have similar needs. I'm not looking for cleverness but for simplicity, because I believe that when God sent His Son Jesus into the world to forgive our sins and to bring us to eternal life in Him, He did so to show us—simply and clearly—that He loves us and that He doesn't want anything to prevent us from receiving His love. That's the Gospel in a nutshell, simply and clearly: God loves you and He loves me and He wants us to live with Him for ever.

And so I yearn to hear the Gospel accounts of our Lord's life and ministry, just as I yearn to hear people speaking of their experiences and relationship with Christ.

Jesus said, *What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops.* [Matt 10:27] Jesus is speaking to you and to me, to all of us who would follow Him.

When you think of discipleship, what comes to mind? Do you tend to think of people listening intently, and earnestly trying to absorb all that they are being taught? Perhaps. But the life of Christian discipleship generally is not that structured, nor is it that intense. Jesus is our Master, and we are to learn from Him. We do so by reading and studying the Holy Scriptures, by being attentive to our prayers, and by reading books of Christian doctrine by solid Christian writers. We learn from Jesus by the example enacted in the Liturgy, in which Jesus took bread, and blessed, broke and gave it to His disciples as His Body. We

Should your witness be rejected, Jesus reminds us and all His disciples through the ages, that the disciple is not better than the Master. Jesus suffered rejection and scorn during the time of His earthly ministry, so we cannot expect to be completely free of such ridicule if we are to be effective and reliable witnesses to Him. Even should this happen, even if we should be laughed at for our life-giving faith, Jesus will remain with us and will see us safely beyond such pain. If we will acknowledge Jesus in the world to other humans, Jesus will acknowledge us in Heaven before His Father.

Let me leave you with a question: *How might we (as a parish) and how might we (as individuals) become more effective in our Christian witness?* Are there things such as resentments or jealousies, unfulfilled expectations or unforgiven sins, to which we are still clinging? Do family, friends or neighbours see more of our spiritual baggage than the beauty of holiness in our lives?

If so, then know and believe that there is a solution. Lay these burdens at the foot of the Cross! Bring them to the Altar when you make your communion. Take a deep breath and risk leaving them behind. Be transformed by the love of Jesus washing over and through you. And when people begin to see how you have changed for the better, give Jesus the glory by telling them about Him.

We are all called to share our faith in Jesus. May He help us to do so, faithfully and effectively.

Χάρις τῷ θεῷ, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. Ἀμήν

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LECTIONS:

Genesis 21.8-21; Psalm 86.1-10; Romans 6.1b-11; Matthew 10.24-39

learn as we confess our sins and receive the healing grace of the Absolution, which is that gift of restoration near to the heart of our Lord. Each of these occasions brings the possibility of learning from Jesus, and of growing in our discipleship.

Our discipleship grows as our relationship with Jesus grows. As we pray, we become more aware of His nature. We discover what He is like. We may hear His voice, or sense a stirring in our hearts in response to the prayers we have offered. And so we continue to learn and to be guided by Him, our one true Master. And this is certainly an important aspect of being His disciple.

Remember that we are called to learn in order that we might be of some use to our Lord. Yes, Jesus loves us freely. His love does not depend on our response to His call. But He *does* call us, each one of us. He calls us at our Baptism, to share the work of the Kingdom, and to bear faithful witness to Him, that all may come to know Jesus as Lord. This is very important.

Yet there is a great difference between confessing Jesus as Lord in the safety of the Liturgy in Church, and making Him known in all the world. Many folks tend to whisper the precious things of our faith, as though we are afraid of being embarrassed or ridiculed by those we encounter. Many become painfully self-conscious if we have to share something about the faith, as if our relationship with Jesus were something to be hidden. Still, Jesus has a word of encouragement for us: *Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account*, Jesus says. *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...* [Matt 5.11] You see, Jesus invites us to risk everything that we have for His sake, and for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus also says, *What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops.* Beloved, we must

*never* be afraid to speak of the things of Jesus! When we see indifference to the faith, stand up and be counted, whether that means speaking out about the erosion of Sunday as a family day of rest and devotion, or increasing secularism within our Governments or Institutions, or whatever. When we see hurt and suffering, then do something about it, and be certain to tell of the steadfastness, the love and the healing power of Christ. When you meet someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer or some other dread disease, offer to pray with them, or at least, be certain to tell them you will keep them in your prayers—and then do it!

Remember that Jesus Whom we worship and Who we are each called to love, serve and proclaim, is the One through Whose Grace alone we are offered eternal life. Jesus not only came to *show* us the way, He came to *be* the way for us. We proclaim Him, in part, by loving as He loves, without reservation; by being always ready to forgive and to accept; and by becoming an instrument of peace and healing at His hand and in His Name. Our actions may speak more loudly than our words, but we need words, too, if others are to understand what sets us apart from the rest of the world. We need to be able to utter the Name, Jesus, with awe and reverence and joy, and to give Him glory for His wonderful actions in our lives. Proclaim these things on the housetops, that Jesus may be made known, glorified and adored.

Please don't let yourself be discouraged by the possible social effects of witnessing to Jesus. The world hungers for knowledge of our Lord, and it yearns for experiences of Him. New Age spirituality flourishes because without Jesus there is a great emptiness in people's lives, yet they don't even know what it is. Jesus could fill that void completely, if people would only let Him. Yet they must first hear of our Lord, and be convinced, before this can happen. So a credible Christian witness is not only desirable, it is *vital*.