

True Witness

Acts 7:54-60, 8:1-8

Each day, it's important to take your bearings. Where are you today? In the Easter season, in the scriptures, in your daily life, in your very self? Spend a few minutes getting your bearings for the day.

Let's briefly examine where we are in the Book of Acts and then begin our day with a prayer for deliverance—for ourselves, our fraternity brothers, and all Exodus Men.

You are about to be sent. The apostles have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is bearing fruit through conversion but also in martyrdom. With the apostles, we need to prepare for our mission, because, as we receive the gift of the Spirit, we, too, will be sent.

Pray that the Lord grants deliverance to you, your family, and your fraternity.

Pray for freedom for all men in Exodus, just as they are praying for you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

A Reading from the Book of Acts

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting to his death.

And on that day a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul laid waste the Church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they

heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

Reflection

Stephen's persecutors stop their ears. They refuse to listen, but this does not change Stephen's focus. Stephen keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father. With this focus, he is able to die like Jesus. Ironically, this is precisely what enables Jesus to reign through him. Jesus reigns as king, not through earthly power, but through the kind of inner strength that gave Stephen the grace to remain peaceful and calm even at his death.

By sharing in Jesus's death, Stephen's sacrifice bears fruit leading to Paul's conversion. It does not happen instantaneously, as Paul (still called Saul) still rages against the Church, yet Stephen's death still obtains the grace of conversion for him.

Why is it that some men believe and others refuse even to listen? This is a great mystery. We must not be proud of our belief. How often do we think we are right, like Paul, only to be knocked off of our feet? We must be humble, realizing that we depend on God for everything, including our faith.

As believers, we must face challenges as we follow the way of the Cross. Bearing witness to the faith is not winning an argument but witnessing to the love of Jesus. Persecution spurs evangelization because it draws us into the mystery of Christ, which bears fruit for ourselves and others.

Pray that the Lord will help you to take up your cross so as to be his true witness.

Week 3 Action Items

1. Witness to your faith.

One of the key elements we see in Acts is the proclamation of Jesus's resurrection. We, too, need to be witnesses, although we have to find the right opportunities. We don't want to be intrusive, yet we do have opportunities to share what God has done in our lives. You can talk about how prayer, asceticism, and fraternity have impacted your life. You can talk about the Easter season and why you are celebrating, and invite people to an Easter celebration.

Jesus wants us to be witnesses of his life and love. We always have to share the truth in love and as an invitation to encounter the one who changed our lives.

2. Host a game night to build community.

As we keep our celebration of Easter going, you could consider hosting a game night. You could do this as a family or a fraternity. Try a new board

game or organize outdoor games. Incorporate Easter festivity and share how you are celebrating throughout the season.

3. Reflect on your current plan.

How are things going so far in Easter? Think back to how things were going during Exodus 90 and Lent and reflect on how things have changed. Are you maintaining progress, or do you find yourself sliding back into bad habits? Do you need to make any adjustments to your plan?