

*Within the Word***Bearing Witness to Christ's Resurrection**

I am a descendant of martyrs. Two of my uncles—my mother's brothers—were persecuted for their faith during the Communist regime in the 1950s. One was tortured and killed because he was a catechist; the other was publicly humiliated and severely beaten because he was a priest. His torturers noticed that when my uncle the priest raised his right hand and said, "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," people bowed their heads in submission. To prevent from such an act, they broke his right hand.

Bearing witness to Christ both in words and deeds has been the hallmark of countless faithful Christians down through the ages. Tertullian—an early church father of the second century—correctly noted this, saying, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." In the Acts of the Apostles, which is proclaimed throughout the Easter season, bearing witness to Jesus as the risen Christ is a major and recurring theme. After his death and resurrection and just before his ascension into heaven, Jesus appeared and said to his disciples, "You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Peter and John (Monday's first reading), for example, refused to cave in to the demands of their persecutors and courageously bore witness to Jesus as the risen Christ. Even though they had been imprisoned and prohibited to speak of the name of Jesus, Peter and John "continued to speak the

word of God with boldness." In Tuesday's reading, Luke—the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles—reports that "the community of believers was of one heart and mind." Because they shared everything in common, there was no needy person among them. How extraordinary it must have been to be part of a community that was completely united and egalitarian. So impressed by the spirit of unity and love of the early disciples, Joseph the Levite from Cyprus sold everything he had and gave the proceeds to the Church. His action was so inspiring that the apostles gave him a new and more suitable name: "Barnabas," which means "son of encouragement." Barnabas bore testimony, not merely by word but by example.

Bearing witness to Christ's resurrection is an essential aspect of the Easter kerygma or proclamation. St. Paul writes, "And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith" (1 Cor 15:14).

In this Easter season, we are invited to make our faith in the Lord's resurrection visible as well as credible to those we meet. We are to communicate to them not only in words but above all in deeds. How? The first thing we can do is to offer peace and reconciliation to those who are wounded and need healing, just as the risen Christ—the perfect embodiment of divine mercy—had done to the distraught disciples on that glorious Easter morning. And we can increase our commitment to the synodal Church that lives in the spirit of perfect communion, in which everyone feels equal and treasured.

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