

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025: Easter 2. Benefice Holy Communion, Ampleforth

Today is the seventh day after Easter Sunday. It is known by various names, including 'Divine Mercy Sunday', the 'Octave Day of Easter', 'White Sunday', and 'Low Sunday'.

Today I would like to call it, 'Witness Sunday'. We see the word in action in both readings today. In Acts, Peter says he and the disciples are witnesses to the identity of Jesus and says, "The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed. God exalted him at his right hand.". In the Gospel, Jesus speaks to doubting Thomas, of witnessing in faith, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The dictionary defines the word "witness" as, "One who has seen or heard something" and "One who furnishes evidence." or someone who can say, "I know this is true.". In Law, witnesses are committed to tell the truth, and if they are good witnesses, that is all they do, nothing less. In the Christian context, a witness is a person who tells the truth about Jesus Christ, talks about having a relationship with Him and most of all behaves like Him. The disciples witnessed and testified to the things they knew to be true about Jesus Christ, the truth of the resurrection, but most of all about knowing Him and as the word disciple means, they were His apprentices and sought to be like Him.

In knowing Jesus Christ personally, you have a relationship with someone who is alive, which brings us back to the resurrection; either Jesus is alive, or he isn't. If he's alive today, then you can know him just as you know your parents or your neighbours or your children or each other today in church. But, because you are in a unique relationship with Him, deeply and personally like no

other, you too can witness to the fact that he rose from the dead and is alive today.

You don't have to be a theologian to be a witness for Christ, or go to Bible College, or be a missionary, or even a vicar! It doesn't require a degree or a high IQ. All is needed is to tell the truth about your relationship with Jesus to anyone who is willing to listen. Witnessing begins with knowing Jesus, talking about what he has done for you, the beautiful relationship you have with Him as Lord of your life, how he guides you day by day, how he gives you strength to face your trials and courage to conquer your fears, how he found you in your loneliness and transformed your life. Most of all, you witness to the fact that He rose from the dead. Everything comes back to that truth which we all are required to witness to. He is risen.

Once that is understood, we need to ask a question of ourselves, "What is it that God wants you to do on earth?" Putting it another way 'what is it that we can do on earth that we can't do in heaven?' We can sing on earth, and we can sing in heaven. We can pray on earth, and we can pray in heaven. We can fellowship with other believers on earth, and we will fellowship with them in heaven. But there is one thing you can do on earth that you will never do in heaven, you can bring the love of Jesus to someone who doesn't know Him. The answer to that question is to be witnesses, to do the telling by our words and actions, to inspire others to seek their own relationship with Him. We can't make them find that relationship, we can only make them see us and think, 'I want that', and invite them on the way - but only the Holy Spirit can make it happen and bring the change of heart and mind so that they discover His love for themselves. If you do the telling, the Holy Spirit can do the changing. So, tell your story about Jesus, how he's changed your life, witness to the truth of his

rising from the dead and the living relationship He has with you, reconciling you to God and to all the universe, and pray, then leave the rest to Him.

As a tribute, I will finish with a quote from ‘The Joy of the Gospel’ by the late Pope Francis, who until his final breath bore witness to the love of Christ and is a challenge to us all to be witnesses to Jesus *“We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives. How can we fail to share that love with others?”*

May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Thanks be to God. Amen.