

Isaiah and other Witnesses about Advent (Isaiah 40:1-11; 2Pet 3: 8-14; Mar 1:1-8;)

* With the coming of the next president Matthew Harrison in power, we were introduced to a new logo –



Witness – Mercy - Life Together. It is on your left. As you see, this beautiful emblem was developed on the basis of the Trinitarian pictograph. It illustrates the inward and outward life of the Christian community with its center standing for Christ – the founder of the Church by whom the whole body is sustained and functions. Without entering into details, we like to comment on the three key words of this logo - *Witness, Mercy, and Life Together.* These words are imperative, and they say nothing except what *ought to be* done. The interesting thing about this is that without *Witness* and *Mercy* there would be no *Life Together*, but *Witness* goes first. In fact, beginning with the church in Jerusalem, all the local churches were started through the witness of Christ's ambassadors. That is why *Witness* goes first.

* But who are those heroes? What has the world known about them? And why do they stand firm in their witness, even unto death? A similar question was addressed to John the apostle, the writer of the Apocalypse when he was pondering upon the vision of the multitude around the throne of God. At that moment one of the elders asked John, *Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?* (Rev 7:13). "My lord," he said, "you know the answer." Along with John's, our questions are not to be avoided. Therefore we exclaim with John, "My Lord, tell us the truth."

* Well, but why don't we start with the etymology of the word *Witness*? It should help bring the important thing down to our level. With this in mind we look for the Greek verb *martureo*. Our dictionary says that it means to bear witness or testify. In the NT usage, it is to provide information about a person or events concerning which a speaker has direct knowledge, (Joh 1:7; 21:24). The next important word is the Greek noun *martus*; it means "witness." In the New Testament this word has two implications; first, as to a person who witnesses or testifies, (Act 26:16; Luk 9:5); and second, as to a person who has been sentenced to death as the result of bearing witness to his beliefs, (Rev 17:6). In addition to the etymology, there are some ethical principles on this matter. Thus, the Mosaic Law insists on the absolute necessity of witnesses (at least two) in all cases which came before a judge, (Deu 17:6; 19:15; Joh 8:17; 2Cor 13:1). Another thing, if anyone who had a testimony to bear but refused to come forward as a witness was considered to have sinned, (Pro 29:24). In closing, it comes from the sinful heart (Mat 15:19), when people witness falsely, yet it is prohibited in the Decalogue, (Exo 20:16).

* Now, being equipped with the exhaustive information about witness, we are ready to address ourselves to the first reading of the day – (Isaiah 40:1-11). A commentary suggests to imagine the scene as it would take place in heaven where the Lord is sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven are standing beside him on his right hand and on his left, (1King 22:19). At that moment Isaiah perceived God and heard His order,

"Comfort, comfort my people," (v.1). At that solemn moment, Isaiah became as one among many who have perceived God's glory and heard His command, *"Comfort, comfort my people," "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem."* And like one among many true witnesses, Isaiah came forward saying, here I am; send me, O Lord, (Isa 6:8).

* Next after Isaiah, there were others who have seen God's glory and spread the good news for 700 years after the great prophet. Finally, the forerunner, John the Baptist, announced the coming of the Lord. Through John the word of God was fulfilled literally as we perceive him crying in the wilderness: *"Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God,* (v. 3). From (Mark 1:1-8), the next reading of the day, we've learned that John's voice was heard by his countrymen from Judea and Jerusalem, and those who came to him with penitent hearts, were baptized, one by one in the Jordan river, (Mar 1:5). On a certain day Jesus came to John. On that occasion, John proclaimed, *I saw the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him,* (Joh 1:32). *He is the Son of God,* (v.34); yet, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (v. 29). And he was; and he is.

* For three and a half years, Jesus laid the foundation of his Church. And finally, by his glorious resurrection that followed after his death on the cross, Jesus won eternal life for the community of believers, so that they would live together in peace and love. However, the prophecy in Isaiah 40 is not fulfilled completely. Unlike the first coming of Jesus as *the Lamb of God*, in his second Advent, we'll see his coming *with might,... behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him,* (v. 10). This image conveys the notion of the upcoming judgment of the King. He will give in return either blessing or punishment. He will return an equivalent for good deeds or evil for evil, (Rom 12:19). These are the realities we need to know.

* After John the Baptist, the twelve heralds came forward with Peter as a head. Today we read the part of his epistle, (2Pet 3:8-14) where he teaches of the second Advent of his Master. As we know, the central part of the apostolic message (kerugma) is the death and the resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. That has been preached for two millenniums along with Christ coming to judge the living and the dead. By first hand we've received the apostolic witness and believed that Jesus will return to take his people out of this world. Meantime the earth will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn, (v.12). This is a picture in connection with the second Advent of Christ! The apostle warns us to be watchful because the last day will come like a thief in the night. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, but we should count it as his mercy toward those who have still not repented, said Peter, (v.9).

* And now going back to the questions *who are those heroes and what has the world known about them?*, we have mentioned three witnesses, the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist, and the apostle Peter. As we know, they were put to death on account of their witness as well as many other witnesses for Jesus. The book of Revelation includes the visionary of the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus

and for the word of God It says, *They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*, (Rev 20:4).

They will receive the crowns prepared for the faithful witnesses; they will not lose their rewards!

* During the times of the apostles, those who were actively sharing the gospel met opposition. When Paul and Silas evangelized Thessalonica, (Acts 17:1-9), there were people who complained that Paul's preaching was disruptive and upsetting. They took their views to the authorities, and ultimately the two missionaries had to flee by night. But a quick look at the text shows that in their case they moved on to Berea and made a few more disciples of Jesus Christ. After Berea Paul went to the capital, where he witnessed of Jesus and again some men joined him and believed, (34).

* But as it was in the beginning and now, there are people who purposefully set out to cause disorder. Jesus called them wolves. He said, *They will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you*; (Mat 10:16,17). From this point the Church anticipates the second Advent of Christ as her redemption from so called wolves, or as a separation of the wheat from the chaff , (Mat 3:12).

Then, the redeemed will live together on a new earth in which righteousness dwells, (2Pet 3:13).

That is Christ' ultimate goal for us! Yes, it's still a promise and our living hope. But now we are given to witness and show mercy with a great anticipation of Christ Advent.

Brothers, let us be faithful as Isaiah in our vocation to the end.

But if anyone among brothers wanders from the truth let him be taught.

Amen