

“You Are My Witness”

Prove it! Did you see it? Do you have pictures? Are there any witnesses? A lot of people may make accusations - but unless there is definite proof, it is often difficult to make an accusation stick. Well for Domino's Pizza it was a Public Relations Nightmare! To top it off, there were thousands of eyewitnesses! You might have seen it on the news or on the internet. Two employees recorded themselves as they carefully concocted a “special treat” for their customers. They ceremoniously dropped pizza toppings on the floor, mashed them around, scraped them up, and daintily arranged them on the pie. They stuck cheese strands up their own noses, extracted them, and giddily sprinkled them over the sauce. They squished and spit the condiments over the top. Then, they uploaded their creativity onto the internet for all to see. As one comedian puts it, “Ya just can't fix stupid.”

Of course, with all those eye witnesses, the outcry was immediate. Domino's Pizza was instantly plunged into the highest damage control alert possible. The two employees, who can only be called “Dumb and Dumber,” were fired on the spot. That particular Domino's outlet was closed for a complete sanitation “do-over.” But for anyone who saw the video the damage was done. Did *you* order a Domino's Pizza the next day?

Have you ever been haunted by this one single fact: Do any of us really know *where* our food has been before it reaches our table at a restaurant? We can joke with our own family in the safety of home about a “five second rule.” But when someone outside our own gene pool is fixing the food, forget about it! The entire restaurant industry is based upon a certain level of trust. We trust others to prepare good, healthful, quality controlled food. Without that trust, we would either all be eating only at home, or there would be a great number of employment opportunities for “food tasters.” Even official food tasters can't protect us from the lurking evils of salmonella or e.coli, toxins that we cannot taste and whose symptoms don't show up immediately.

I still remember the night after eating at a particular restaurant for a friend's birthday when I couldn't decide if I should kneel or sit when I went into the bathroom. It was a night when you pray: “Okay God - either end this or take my life NOW!” And it was on a Saturday night when I had to be ready for Church the next morning. I never ate at that restaurant again. Recently our “trust” in the food industry has been tested and tarnished by tainted spinach, tomatoes, and peanut butter. Trust is something that evolves over time. And trust can be shattered in a moment.

Talk to any parent who has visited their first semester college student's dorm room? Do

you still “trust” all you taught them about cleanliness being next to godliness? Do you trust that your teaching them responsibility really sank in? We weave the delicate strands of trust beginning with our youngest children. Do you “trust” they are washing their hands after going to the bathroom? Do you “trust” they are looking both ways before crossing the street? Do you “trust” they will say “please” and “thank you” every time? Do you “trust” their friends, and their friends’ parents? Do you “trust” your teen’s pledges about drugs, alcohol, and sex? As an adult do you “trust” your co-workers?

Trust is what finally enabled that first generation of disciples to take on their new identity as eye-and-ear witnesses. The disciples were terrified after the arrest, trial, condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus. Their master had been branded as a common criminal, and with two other convicts was executed in the most hideous, humiliating manner the Roman state had devised. After his death Jesus’ disciples scurried and scattered, hiding themselves away from the sight of religious or state authorities. Then there was that empty tomb. Talk about being stunned. The stories of a risen Jesus startled and confused them even further. And just when you think you’ve seen and heard everything, suddenly, Jesus stands in their midst, holding out his hands and feet for inspection, inviting them to poke and prod at him, calmly asking for a bite to eat, and then nibbling down some fish.

How would we react? Luke’s text describes it well. Their status was a combination of opposing emotions: confused, despairing, hopeful, joyful, disbelieving. Or in Luke’s exact words, “in their joy they were [still] disbelieving.” The disciples stood before the risen Jesus overjoyed, and baffled. Their hearts were full. But their heads were empty. That’s when Jesus sat them down and gave them a crash course in “Remedial Discipleship 101.” It is not until the disciples tune-in to Jesus’ “Remedial 101” lecture that their wonderment turns to witnessing. That’s when they start to really listen. At last they open their hearts and minds to understand the lessons Jesus had already taught them: The Messiah was “to suffer;” the Messiah was to rise from the dead on the third day; and finally, the Messiah would offer “repentance and forgiveness of sins” if the disciples were to continue his mission “in his name.” Basically, Jesus is saying to them, “YOU ARE MY WITNESSES! Tell them what you have seen. Share with them the words I have shared with you! And if I have had an effect on your life, tell them that too!”

They were Jesus’ witnesses. But now they are dead! But the questions are still being asked. Just two weeks ago we had Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord. And there are still people saying: Prove it! Did you see it? Do you have pictures? Are there any witnesses? Jesus simply asks that we tell others what we have heard from those who have heard it from those who have heard it from those who were there.

One day a teacher was asking the kids in her fourth grade class to name the person whom they considered the greatest human being alive in the world today. Tons of answers started to fly around the classroom. A little boy spoke up and said, “I think it’s Tiger Woods. He’s the

greatest golfer in the world, ever" A little girl said, "I think it's the Pope because he cares for people and doesn't get paid for it at all." Another little girl said, "I think it's President Obama because he's the President of the United States and the United States is the greatest country in the world." And yet another little boy said, "I think it's my mom because she takes care of me and my brother." Over and over again, kids cited one celebrity after another.

But then it was little Donnie's turn. And without even hesitating, when the teacher asked him the question, he replied, "Well I think its Jesus Christ because he loves everybody and is always ready to help them." Mrs. Thompson smiled and said, "Well I certainly like your answer Donnie, because I'm a Christian too and I also admire Jesus. But there's one slight thing that's wrong. I said the greatest living person, and of course Jesus lived and died almost two thousand years ago. Do you have another name in mind?" Then with a simple, innocent, wide-eyed look little Donnie said, "Oh no, Mrs. Thompson, that's not right at all. Jesus Christ is alive! He lives in me right now!"

That is the witness we are asked to give. That Jesus Christ is alive and that he actually lives inside the hearts and souls of each and everyone of us here!" That is the Easter message. Prove it! Make us believe. People want to know the facts. That is the job of a witness. Tell what you know so that the Holy Spirit can convince others to believe it.

Today we are acknowledging "Member Appreciation Day". Each one of you is appreciated. Because, through each one of you someone knows that Christ lives. Maybe you were one of the people who gave a dollar or a can of soup on Souper Bowl Sunday. Was it your gift, received from a tag on the Angel Tree, that made a person feel loved at Christmas? Maybe it was your kindness to the store clerk, that counteracted the mean response they got from the customer before you. The kid from Martin Luther / Silver Springs School may never know who you are, but your change pouch made it possible for them to go to Bear Creek Camp and be a part of the community of God. And even if you don't think you do anything special, you provide a witness every Sunday when you come to Church. The neighbor who notices you getting in your car every Sunday, they know that you go to worship God. Your kids - yes the same ones who complain about having to get dressed and dragged out early, they have learned from you that worshipping God is something of value to their parents. St. Peter's has been in existence for 257 years, but were it not for faithful members giving faithful witness to their faith, ministry would not be happening in this place. So we wanted to take a moment, not that it's necessary since we are only responding through faith, but we wanted to express our appreciation to one another for being willing - to be a witness. After all, it's what we are Called to do.

We may not have been there to see Jesus raised from the dead - but no one can tell us that he isn't alive within us. Our actions show it. Our voices tell it. Our mission proclaims it. We are witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - and we are here to share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others. Jesus - and the Holy Spirit - are counting on us to be

their witnesses. Amen