

Lesson 1: My Identity as a Christian Witness

What is a witness?

- The Greek word for witness is μάρτυρας (mártyras)
- The word “mártyras” and its derivatives appear around 200 times in the New Testament.
- If one is to learn about Christian witnessing, then intuitively the New Testament (and especially the teachings of Christ) is the primary source to finding a rich cluster of passages that enable us to define Christian witness.

What does Christian witness mean?

Christian witness emerges from the mystery through which a Christian is privileged to get closer to the source of Holiness, which is God Himself. This closeness is attained through the practice of Liturgical worship in the church, particularly through the sacraments. Otherwise, without an intimate relationship with God, how can we witness to Him?

All of our church’s feasts and sacraments serve not only to deepen our understanding of God, but more importantly, to strengthen our relationship with Him.

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying ‘if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:37)

The living water that Christ is referring to here is the Holy Spirit who is tasked to support us in our mission of witnessing.

*“Living water, i.e. always moving; for when the grace of the spirit has entered into and settled in the mind, it flows freer than any fountain, and neither fails, nor empties, nor stagnates. The wisdom of Stephen, the tongue of Peter, the strength of Paul, are evidence of this. Nothing hindered them; but, like impetuous torrents, they went on, carrying everything along with them.”
(St. John Chrysostom)*

St. John Chrysostom hints that the process in its essence is contagious, as St. Stephen, St. Peter, and St. Paul with the grace of God have witnessed to everyone, we are also called to do so.

The first half of Christian witnessing occurs when we draw closer to God both as individuals and as a community. The second half of Christian witnessing occurs when others notice our behavior and are subsequently drawn to God.

Who instituted Christian witness and wo do we bear witness to?

Jesus Christ Himself commanded us to bear witness for Him.

“You will bear witness for me.” (Acts 1:8)
And proclaim, **“Their testimony to Jesus.” (Revelation 1:2)**

Why should we participate in Christian witnessing?

1. It is the fulfillment of the two greatest commandments God has given us
2. It is our duty to emanate Christ’s light
3. It is one of the purposes God gave us when He created us

1. Christian witnessing is the fulfillment of the two greatest commandments God has given us

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Mathew 22:37-40)

- As for the first commandment ...
We are called to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. In doing so, we can draw close to the source of Holiness.
- The second commandment is a continuation of the first commandment...
We are called to love our neighbors and do virtuous acts towards other people. In the same way, the act of witnessing is a reaction and a direct consequence of our love/union with God. We cannot help but speak about Him in our day-to-day life. Even when Peter and John were severely threatened to cease witnessing for Jesus, they replied and said:

**“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
(Acts 4:20)**

When we are in love with God, we will want others to taste and witness how beautiful He is. **“Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalms 34:8)**

**“Therefore, the first commandment teaches every kind of godliness. For to love God with the whole heart is the cause of every good. The second commandment includes the righteous acts we do toward other people. The first commandment prepares the way for the second and in turn is established by the second. For the person who is grounded in the love of God clearly also loves his neighbor in all things himself. The kind of person who fulfills these two commandments experiences all the commandments”
(St Cyril of Alexandria)**

2. It is our duty as witnesses of Christ to emanate His light

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Mathew 5:16)

Note that the passage does not say “that they may see your good works and glorify you” but rather “glorify your father in heaven”. The more we dive deeper into our relationship with Christ, the more we emanate His light and in turn draw others with us along the way. Therefore, participating in any form of service without Christ as the center defeats the purpose of Christian witnessing

Even though God is the one who kindled the light in each one of us, it is our duty as Christians to let that light continue to shine; not just for our own sake, but also for the sake of others who may profit from these rays and to be guided by the truth.

**“Show forth therefore a life worthy of His grace; that even as it is everywhere preached, so this light may everywhere accompany the same.”
(St. John Chrysostom)**

Christ directly says that he has been called **The Vine** that we may clearly understand that to those who are eager to be closely joined to Him and choose to enjoy a close union with Him, will be able to produce virtue and bear spiritual fruits since they are directly supplied from the source of virtue Himself. This is how we can emanate His light.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

3. When God created us, He did not just give us life but also a purpose

This purpose is related to us being created in the image of God and after His likeness.

“And God said, Let Us make man in our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

What does it mean to bear witness and how can we do it on a daily basis?

The answer to this question will be the main focus throughout this year’s MIX’s curriculum. The goal is to understand what Christ meant by Christian witness, how the early church executed this commandment and finally how it is carried out daily in each of our lives even without us noticing.

Deeper dive into Christian witness

The sermon on the mount (**Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7**) serves as an essential role in our salvation as it teaches us to be transformed after the likeness of God as discussed in Genesis 1:26-27. In the sermon on the mount, there are multiple ways in which Jesus calls us to witness to Him.

1. Christ commands us to hunger and thirst for righteous acts
2. Christ commands us to be the salt of the earth
3. Christ commands us to be the light of the world

1. Jesus Christ commands us to hunger and thirst for righteous acts.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Mathew 5:6)

One incident where Christ Himself fulfilled this commandment is when He was preaching to the Samaritan woman that He is the Messiah. The disciples came to Him and marveled that He was talking to her. After receiving Christ’s witness, the Samaritan woman left to witness for Christ to her own village.

“Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did.” (John 4:29)

The disciples then urged Jesus to eat... **“But He said to them, ‘I have food of which you do not know...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.’” (John 4:32-34)**

In saying that it is His food to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish His work, He also portrays the mission of the Apostolic ministry that is to come after and that is to save what was lost. Just like how we have the desire to eat and drink, He also has the desire for us to be saved. Just like how the Father sent the Son into the world, the Son also sends us into the world to witness to Him. Jesus speaks to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane and says:

“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them to the world.” (John 17:18)

2. Jesus Christ commands us to be the salt of the earth.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Mathew 5:13)

Why does Jesus command us to be the salt of the earth and what does it mean?

Christ is saying that we are not accountable for our own life only, but also for the entire world. He did not send us to one or two cities, or ten or twenty, or even an entire nation (as He did with the prophets in the Old Testament). Instead, He sent us to the entire world, **a world that has fallen into a state of separation from God.**

By saying “You are the salt of the earth”, Jesus signifies that all of humanity has essentially lost its flavor as a consequence of losing its connection with God. For this reason, He tasks the disciples and all of us to benefit everyone by bringing them back to Christ.

Food for thought: salt preserves food from becoming rotten. However, once the food has already decayed, salt can do nothing of itself to restore the food again to become fresh. In the same way, Christ’s task was to set everyone free from their rotten state, however, to ensure that humans do not return again to that state of sin is now our job as the salt of the earth.

How can we become the salt of the earth and apply what Christ has commanded?

We can become the ‘salt of the earth’ by making sure that both our speeches and actions are aligned and work together to edify the people around us and are not contradicting our identity as witnesses of Christ.

- As for our speeches...

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” (Colossians 4:6)

A good word serves to enlighten the people around us and teach them to pursue virtue. When a friend commits a sin, we should not dwell on it, or make a display of the situation and use it to judge one another. If the words we speak are used to judge one another, it is better for us to stay silent and not say anything. Instead let us make sure that we use our words carefully in a way that encourages the people around us to dive deeper in the faith and in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

“For to this end God gave you a mouth and a tongue, that you might give thanks to Him, that you might build up your neighbor.” (St. John Chrysostom)

- As for our works...

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Since we are His workmanship, we are created to do good works. Since He ordained us, we should walk in His commandments and imitate Him. This is also echoed in the book of St. James:

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:18-20)

Even if somebody believes rightly in the Father and the Son, as well as in the Holy Spirit, if he does not lead the right kind of life, his faith will not benefit him at all as far as his salvation is concerned...For our life and behavior must be pure as well.
(St. John Chrysostom)

Since we are His creation, we are then called to live a life of virtue, worthy of our heavenly citizenship, and stand firmly, being strengthened by God to complete our duty of witnessing on earth.

3. Jesus Christ commands us to be the light of the world.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Mathew 5:14-16)

After calling us ‘the salt of the earth’, He then calls us ‘the light of the world’. Salt preserves something in its state and prevents it from changing to a worse state. On the other hand, light brings the object to a better state by enlightening it.

- The “Lamp” is the divine Word of God.

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalms 119:105)

- The Word of God is both a sustenance for us and a guide on our mission to bring everyone closer to Him.
- The “lampstand” can be seen as the church which holds the word of life and the body of Christ. The church is to teach with a pure light that people may not only hear the word of God but also see His works. Through witnessing the love of God through the behavior of His sons and daughters, everyone is edified, and God is glorified.
- The title “lampstand” can also be attributed to St. Mary. Although St. Mary was a woman of very few words, she is an example to all of us to imitate, in bearing Christ’s light into the world.

Bible verses in this font are to be memorized
Bible verses in this font are to be understood only

“You are the lampstand, made of pure gold, that carries the ever-burning lamp.” (Sunday Theotokia part 5)

Once we start our mission of witnessing to the Holy one, we are tempted to make it about ourselves. However, just like how the Son brought glory to the Father, we also need to bring glory to God.

Outside the sermon on the mount, there is a very important passage that explains to us how we can apply Christian witness in our day-to-day life.

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ (Mathew 25:34-36)

It is us who hunger and thirst and not God. Looking back at the Samaritan woman, she was the one who was hungry for God and thirsty for the living water. When she received Christ’s witness, she partook of the living water freely (John 4:15 & John 7:37) and in turn went to feed her entire village with the same living water. As God fills us with His love through our worship services (and especially through the Divine Liturgy), we are to take that love and fill the earth with the same love.

Did you know? At the end of the Liturgy, the priest says, “depart in peace, the peace of the Lord be with you”. For many people, this statement is viewed as the conclusion of the Liturgy and an invitation to go home. However, this statement is in fact an invitation for the Liturgy after Liturgy. In the Liturgy, we are called to encounter Christ. After the Liturgy, we are called to bring forth the peace, joy and light of Christ that we encountered into the world

The term Liturgy in its Greek form means “the work of the people” because the people who encountered Christ (like the Samaritan woman) are called to fulfill their work of witnessing by feeding the entire world with Christ.

Does our Lord hunger or thirst? He is the one who created the heavens and earth and feeds the birds of the air. Instead, God identifies with His creation. He does not hunger or thirst in His own nature, but in His saints, servants, poor, widows and those who are afflicted. And so, **“inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Mathew 25:40)**

“Blessed is he who considers the poor and the needy; the Lord will deliver him in an evil day.” (Psalms 41:1)

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Exploring the end of each Gospel

As mentioned in the introduction, the teachings of Christ found in the four Gospels are the primary sources we have in defining Christian witness. Let us now look at how each of the four gospels end and how Christ concludes His ministry by commanding His disciples (and essentially each one of us) to witness to Him.

Gospel of Matthew:

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.’” (Mathew 28:18-20)

- Authority was given to Him in both heaven and earth so that He who reigns in Heaven may also reign on earth in every human’s heart through the faith and works of His believers.
- Jesus telling His disciples to “make disciples of all the nations” teaches them to do unto others as He had done unto them.
- Jesus will be with us in our mission to witness.

Gospel of Mark:

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned...And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen” (Mark 16:15-16, 20)

Just like how the apostles confirmed their words by the signs that followed, so also should our words be confirmed with our actions.

Gospel of Luke:

“And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high...And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” (Luke 24:48-49, 52-53)

They rejoiced greatly because they had seen their Master gloriously ascend into heaven. They eagerly looked for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit and had hope that Christ would accompany them in the journey to come.

Gospel of John:

“So, Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’ and when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (John 20:21-23)

“Here our Lord Jesus Christ ordained the disciples to be guides and teachers of the world, and to be ministers of his Divine Mysteries and also commanded them, for the time was now come, like lights to illuminate and enlighten not merely the country of Judea...but rather also all under the sun, and men scattered throughout all lands...to call sinners to repentance, and to minister to those who were in unfortunate situations, whether of body or soul, and to save the world by their teaching.”
(St. Cyril Of Alexandria)

Introduction to Acts

- The book of Acts reflects the four Gospels on the matter in a simple verse:

“You will bear witness to me.” (Acts 1:8)

- The end of the four Gospels is the beginning of the book of Acts. This is the beginning of the acts of the early church and the apostle’s mission of witness of whom is said:

“There is no speech nor language in which their voice is not heard. Their sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words have reached to the end of the world.” (Psalms 19:3-4)

- In liturgy, we are reminded of the theme of witnessing by concluding the Praxis reading (Book of Acts) with the following:

“The word of the Lord shall grow, multiply, be mighty, and be confirmed in the Holy Church of God. Amen”