

**April 30, 2016 An Unlikely Witness Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in the course of my life, I have seen many entertaining courtroom dramas on television. Among the lawyers featured in these popular series, "Perry Mason" and "Horace Rumpole" are two of my favorites. Years of admiring the skills of criminal attorneys have taught me one valuable lesson: the prosecuting and defense attorneys must call upon a witness who is credible and appealing. If the witness fails in offering valuable evidence during his testimony, the lawyer's case is likely to be severely damaged. An attractive and believable witness may be all that the attorney needs to win his case.

One of the unlikeliest figures to come forth in defense of Jesus after his death is the first of the apostles, Peter. Recall that the night before Christ's death, Peter denied him, not once but three times, and publicly; on the day of Our Lord's crucifixion he deserted him, and on the evening of his resurrection, he was in hiding, locked behind closed doors. For a Jew, the crucifixion was a scandal; the one who hangs on a tree is cursed by God. Yet Peter resolutely defends Christ and proclaims him risen from the dead! And he does so at great risk to his own life! How do we account for such a remarkable change of heart? Perhaps we are given a clue in today's Gospel.

In the Emmaus story, the evangelist, Luke, writes, "The Lord has been raised and appeared to Simon (Peter)". (Lk.24:34) In his sermon recorded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter boldly defends his faith in the crucified and risen Christ by uttering the words, "God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, for it was impossible for him to be held by it". (Acts 2:24) Tellingly, Peter identifies himself as a "witness" in his sermon, and declares, "God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses". (Acts 2:32) He offers convincing testimony based on the scriptures of the Old Testament. He quotes the sixteenth psalm. "Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exalted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption". The tomb of Jesus was discovered empty on Easter Sunday morning!

As baptized Christians, where do we stand? Are we prepared to offer sworn testimony in defense of Jesus? Would we be credible witnesses? Are we willing to take great risks defending our risen Lord in an increasingly secular and unbelieving culture? Are we on the side of those who prosecute the Church and her representatives? Do we listen to credible "witnesses" of our Catholic faith?

Let us remind ourselves that when the risen Christ returns in glory, he will "judge the living and the dead". The falsely condemned Son of God will assume the role of our judge. May Our Lord give us the courage and strength to defend him in the face of all trials and tribulations in this life! A reward awaits us in the next. "...And I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come". (Apostles Creed)

Amen!