

We live in a crazy world. People do and say funny things. Even lawyers. No, I'm not going to start off with any lawyer jokes, but many of you have seen lists of 'bloopers' taken from real-life courtroom cross-examinations. These contain funny things that lawyers say. I want to enter these into evidence at this time:

One lawyer, during a cross examination, pointed to a picture. "Were you present," he asked, "when this picture of you was taken?"

Another lawyer asked: "She had 3 children, right?" The witness answered, "Yes." The lawyer asked, "How many were boys?" "None," answered the witness. The lawyer asked, "Were there any girls?"

Another attorney asked a witness, "The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he?"

An attorney cross-examining a doctor asked: "Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?" The doctor said, "No." The attorney continued, "Did you check for blood pressure?" And again the doctor said, "No." The attorney took a step closer to the witness stand and said, "Did you check for breathing?" The doctor said, "No." Then the attorney seemed to get to his point by asking, "So then, it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?" And the doctor said, "No." Then the attorney said, "How can you be so sure, doctor?" And the doctor said, "Because his brain was in a jar sitting on my desk."

At this point the attorney pursued this line of questioning a little too far: "But could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?" And the doctor wisely responded, "I suppose it is possible that he could have been alive and practicing LAW somewhere."

First, some background on the text from the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. This book begins with Jesus promising to bestow on His followers the same Holy Spirit that empowered Him. We need to recall that in Luke's gospel, in Jesus' very first sermon in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners...." (Lk 4:18). Remember that Luke is the author of both the gospel of that name and the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, so there are a lot of connections.

So Jesus promises His followers – (the same crowd who disappointed Him by deserting and betraying Him in His crucifixion) the very same Spirit that empowered Him. A little while later in Acts, Jesus' promise is fulfilled – we will hear of this next Sunday – Pentecost – that the Spirit descends on a huge global gathering of Jesus' first followers, and they all begin to speak in a myriad of languages.

Get it? In Luke's Gospel and in the ACTS the Holy Spirit descends on people in order to help them speak. Just before Jesus ascends to His Father, He gives them the Holy Spirit so that they can become "my witnesses from Jerusalem until the ends of the earth." There are 3 quick points here! First – we can't witness to the world for Jesus if we haven't received the Holy Spirit. 2. When we receive the Holy Spirit, that empowers us, compels us, enables us, pushes, prods us to be a witness. 3. All of us received the Holy Spirit at our baptism and a second huge gift of the Holy Spirit at our confirmation. We have been given the Holy Spirit for a purpose -- in order to witness.

Which is where we fit in – and is the meat of my homily – that we are to be Christ's witnesses. I guess we ought to be grateful that 'witness' is all that Jesus calls us to be. Thanks be to God Jesus didn't say, "You'll

be my heroes.” Or, “You’ll be my fearless fighters.” Or, “You’ll be my wise and biblically knowledgeable professors.” He said, “Be my witnesses.”

Furthermore, He promises to give His first followers His Holy Spirit that they might be obedient to what He has commanded, that they might do what He’s called them to do.

Again, we ought to be grateful that Jesus doesn’t expect us to witness without His help. He doesn’t assign us the job of witness and leave us to sink or swim.

It’s as if He says, “I’m leaving to go to my Father, but I’m not leaving the world to its own devices. You’ll be my witnesses, my voice, my presence in the world, all the way to the ends of the map. I’ll give you my Holy Spirit to enable you to do what I’m commanding you to do.” You, WITNESS!

Here are some examples: “Well, like you, I wasn’t big on joining things like clubs and groups so, when I moved here, I just never joined a church. Then my world fell apart and so did I. I was alone. I Didn’t know which way to turn. And nobody cared. That’s when I found the church, or the church found me. I think you also need a group of folks who know you and who care. Life can be too tough to go alone. Why don’t you let me pick you up next Sunday and we’ll go to church and have brunch afterward?” Someone has become empowered by the Spirit to witness.

“I know what you’re talking about. I didn’t grow up as a Christian either. Like you, I was clueless about the faith. But I was curious and, when I started thinking and reading, when I showed up here at this church, well, so much stuff started making sense. I found where I was supposed to be all along. Let me help you try being curious about the Christ and His church.”

That’s a WITNESS.

“I know, I know. The church is full of hypocrites, sinners. Like any human organization, the church has its problems. Still, I can’t figure out how I could have heard about Christ, much less followed Him, without the church. From what I’ve learned, following Christ is just too difficult and demanding to try it solo.”

There’s a WITNESS.

“I’ll admit that when you look at the state of the world, maybe the condition of our own family, there’s lots of reasons to lose hope, just to give up and say there’s no way out. But when we know the story of Christ, the way He overcame death, sin, defeat with His life, death and resurrection, well, then we can come to believe that there’s always hope. It’s never over until God says it’s over. That’s what we believe. So, despite all the perfectly good reasons not to have hope, I’ve got hope for tomorrow.”

Another WITNESS.

“The crazy thing is, well, you know me. I’m the silent type. Shy. Never want to stick out or make a big show about anything. Still, when they were about to vote to run the homeless people out of town, well, I spoke up. ME! I told them it wasn’t right. I said that I’d take personal responsibility for talking with all the churches in town and organizing a way of reaching out and helping those without housing. What was I thinking? What made me stand up and say that even though there were lots of people in the room who didn’t want to hear that?”

That’s a WITNESS, an ordinary person empowered by the extraordinary Holy Spirit.

Luke, the author of ACTS, has prodded me today to say to each one of you: YOU ARE A WITNESS. You are someone who has been ordered by the risen Christ personally to speak up and to speak out for Him, to stand up for Him, to rally others to His cause, to seek out those who haven't yet gotten the news that Jesus is risen and reigning in the world.

But don't panic! "Me? Little old me?" we ask ourselves. "I don't know a lot about the bible, not good at public speaking, don't have much courage, I'm not a leader." Fill in the blanks with all of our disqualifications to be a witness for Christ.

That's okay because Christ doesn't expect us to do anything for which He does not equip us. He makes us, even with all of our limitations, a witness. Then He promises to empower us with His Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that animated, emboldened Him in His preaching and teaching, He gives to us.

US! WITNESSES ALL! ITE – MISSA EST! (Repeat) If you knew Latin, you could have left Mass now! Now GO! – YOU ARE SENT! Is the way the mass used to end. We are to get out of here and out into Apex and Cary and Holly Springs and Fuquay-Varina and everywhere we live and speak up! Speak up for goodness, truth, compassion, kindness, reconciliation. That's speaking up for Christ. That's a witness. Amen. (adapted from Willimon, PULPIT RESOURCE, May 21, 2023, p. 24-26)