

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Palm Sunday and Confirmation
Saturday, April 9, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 10, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

“Easter is Just on the Horizon”

Luke 23:1-56

Throughout the Lenten Season, in our midweek services, we have been focusing on the “Witnesses to Christ.” Today, we see an unlikely witness: the repentant thief on the cross.

The Greek word for “witness” is “marturion” from which we get the word “martyr.” When we speak of martyrs, we generally speak of those who were killed on account of their faith. The martyrs were witnesses. The thief on the cross was not a “martyr” in the classic sense – he was being crucified for being a thief. Yet, he is a witness in that he boldly bore witness of his faith in Christ and the resurrection as he humbly asks, “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom.”

All throughout the Lenten season, we had been focusing our attention on those who were witnesses concerning what Christ was going to do. The confirmands will be confirming the faith of their Baptism as a witness of what He has done. Confirming the faith of your Baptism is a special day as it is the first time that you publicly answer the questions which your godparents answered for

you at your Baptism. From this day forward, in the eyes of the church, you are viewed as an adult. This is the first time that you publicly answer these specific questions, but I pray that this is not the only time you will publicly make a bold confession of your faith.

It is every Christian's right and duty and privilege to share and to bear witness of what Christ our Lord has done. Be thankful that we do not live in a society where being a witness, being a "martyrion" means standing up and proclaiming your faith in the face of an angry mob wanting to nail you to a cross. However, the type of opposition to your confession of faith you will experience will be challenging.

I tell the kids every year, you are entering into the most difficult years of your life – personally and spiritually. I tell this to every class, and many of you have heard me say this before; statistics show that 50% of 8th grade confirmands will stop coming to worship by the end of their 9th grade year. I tell the kids each year, "Don't be a statistic." But this message is also for the parents. 9th graders don't drive.

We are all called to be witnesses. The thing about that word and why the ancient Christians joined together the idea of being a "witness" and being a "martyr" is that you never refer to a person as a "witness" unless they have something important or meaningful to share.

We don't "bear witness" to unimportant things. Therefore, be mindful of what you are doing today. What you are doing today is important.

Jesus says, "He who bears witness of Me before men, I will bear witness of him before My Father in heaven. He who denies Me before men, I will deny him before My Father in heaven."

Making a public confession of faith in Christ is a matter of eternal life and death – not just today, but through your length of days.

This is an important day in your life as you confirm the faith of your Baptism, as you stand as a witness before God and His church. In a few moments I will ask you: "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully? Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" And you will answer each of these questions: "I do, by the grace of God."

Everything that we have in this life – personally and spiritually is solely by the grace of God. The repentant thief demonstrates through his humble words that he was prepared to answer those questions. The reality is that what you are stating before God and His Church today is that you would rather suffer the fate of the thief on the cross than to fall away from faith and become a statistic.

We do not know much about that thief on the cross. One thing that we

do know is, that very day, he was in Paradise. His journey on earth was about to end in death. Hanging next to him is the Son of God who has announce, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who lives and believes in Me will never die." For the thief, Paradise was just on the horizon. For Christ, who is the firstfruits of the resurrection, Easter was just on the horizon.

It is not the level of education we have achieved which allows us to confidently proclaim our faith. Our faith is not an intellectual exercise. It is the Holy Spirit who has created faith in us at our Baptism. We find it amazing that a crucified thief could gain such insight when the scribes and teachers of the law were blind to who Christ was.

But then, is it really any more amazing than what we have experienced. It is not our great intellect, education, or life of righteousness which gave us insight. Faith was created and freedom from the guilt of our sin was brought to us through no work of our own. And, like the thief, we rejoice as the gates of heaven have been opened to us.

God is gracious, and He has shown you what is important. He has called you to be a witness. We celebrate Palm Sunday with "Hosanna's" to our King, even though, like with Christ and the thief, our journey will end in death (unless our Lord returns first), but we press forward in the face of trials, difficulties, tragedies, even death, knowing that Easter is just on the horizon. Amen.