

Tell Your Story

By Rev. Derek Elphick

The Scriptures use "witnessing" to remind people of their history,

their roots,
the sacred journey of their past.

Moses and Joshua did it with the Israelites

to remind them how they had won their freedom

and how it *couldn't* have happened without the Lord

and the support of each other.

Moses encouraged his people to "witness" to each other, to

"to teach (the Lord's statutes) diligently to your children, and talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

And a whole generation later, Joshua said,

*"When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?,' then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, **that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty**" (Joshua 4:21-24).*

So our topic today is "witnessing"

Not a term we use much in our church
Might sound old-fashioned...

- do we really need to do "witnessing" today?
- besides it's a Biblical thing, isn't that left to preachers, priests?
- isn't this about spreading the Gospel, evangelization?

Readings from the teachings of the New Church make the point that...

- no one "gets" their religion, their faith on their own
- get it from others
 - "...through the agency of parents, teachers, preachers, books..."*
 - (DP 172:6)

And the point I'd like to make today is that if we, as a society, a church

stop witnessing
 stop talking about our faith
 stop talking our sacred traditions
 stop talking about God, faith, His Word

then evil, chaos, the "lowest common denominator" wins

Think about it...

Evil hates the light
 Evil spirits hate the Lord and hate His truth
 Which means that they don't want us to "testify"

- they don't want us to verbalize, say out loud, what this religion, this New Church faith means to us

But you might be thinking...

"Who do I testify/witness to?"
 My children are grown up - they're making their own choices
 My friends/co-workers aren't in the church - what would be the point of me telling them my story?

Well, the quick and powerful answer, according to New Church doctrine, is that in witnessing, in testifying, in telling our story...

- we're not the ones doing the actual teaching, the leading...
- the Lord just needs us to speak, to open our mouth - He will take care of the rest

You see, in telling our story, in talking about our faith journey, we're not...

- trying to win an argument
- trying to brainwash
- or guilt trip
- or say, "You should be like me" or your mother, grandfather, etc.

In telling our story, we're letting the Lord lead for as we read in our lesson today...

"The Word has to be taught through intermediaries, the agency of others...but still it is not taught by intermediaries (namely, us) but by the Lord through them" (DP 172:6).

So it's important that we speak...

- find those moments w/friends, loved ones, co-workers
 - over coffee or dinner
 - or on a walk
 - or while on vacation or playing golf

to talk about

- our roots, our history, the struggles we've had on our faith journey, and why we didn't give up

It's important to be open and honest about our past...

to be curious about where we've come from,

to learn about our background,

our history,

the choices and sacrifices made by our parents and grandparents...

because the world we live in today

doesn't seem very interested in the sacred traditions of the past

doesn't seem very interested in our "connectedness" with God.

Today, the "connectedness" we're talking about is offered to us...

On a virtual platform, via the internet.

This endless stream of sensational news and social media drama

divorces us from the real world,

divorces us from normal human interaction,

divorces us from the wind and sun and rustling leaves of trees in the outside world.

This virtual "connectedness" is touted as a good thing

and yet people report feeling more isolated, more lonely, more depressed than ever before.

Rather than connecting us to God this platform appears to be

disconnecting us from God

and "when people stop believing in God they become capable of believing in anything" (Cammaerts).

Obviously the internet has many positive features to it...

- global, instantaneous communication
- incredible way of spreading information, the news of the Lord in His Second Coming
- w/the advent of the internet the world has revolutionized the way it conducts business, for the better

The internet itself as a platform is neutral - it can be used for good or bad purposes

Right now, for human "connectedness" it seems online news outlets and social media outlets and "chat rooms" do more to...

- pit us against each other and generate ill-will than anything else.

And what we desperately need as human beings is the sacred.

We need to be able to connect...

- in healthy, edifying, God-centered ways
- to the sacred traditions of our past
- to nature, the great outdoors, which is the physical expression of the Lord's love and wisdom

Many of the important decisions in life are being made

in a virtual world (chat rooms) - people we don't really know

Friends, family, loved ones are being bypassed in favor of a virtual community...

Which...

**divorces us from the sacred
divorces us from beauty
divorces us from all that is holy, pure and clean**

Brings to mind, Dostoyevsky's prediction that,

"The world will be saved by beauty."

And what is beauty? Truth. The Lord's truth.

This is why the sacred, Biblical tradition of witnessing mustn't be lost.

It is the way in which knowledge about God, His Word, the life of faith and religion is passed on from one generation to the next.

"People are not taught directly from heaven, but indirectly...No one gets their religion on their own, but from others" (DP 254).

Witnessing connects us to the Lord's love for, as we learned today,

"God loves each and every human being; and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love."

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How can our friends and loved ones feel the Lord's love

- feel less lonely?
- less isolated?
- less depressed?

- by us witnessing, by us telling our story.

Witnessing connects us to the sacred,

to that which promises to give our lives

purpose,
meaning,
and value.

When stories get told, everyone benefits, young and old alike.

We gain new perspectives,

a new appreciation for things we didn't know or knew but had forgotten.

We gain new insights

and make the decision to break old patterns,

break the chain of bad familial traits.

Most importantly, we bear witness to the Lord

Who is leading us to "greener pastures"

since the workings of Providence can only be seen in retrospect.

This is why the Lord encourages us to tell our story, to *"go home and tell your friends what good things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."* (Mark 5:19).

AMEN.