



WITNESSING HOPE

LECTIO (Reading): 1 Peter 3:13-22)

13 Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good?
14 But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be
afraid or terrified with fear of them,
15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation
to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,
16 but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when
you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be
put to shame.
17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.
18 For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the
spirit.
19 In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison,
20 who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during
the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.
21 This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body
but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities,
and powers subject to him.

MEDITATIO (explanation)

This text in the Bible is taken from the first “letter” attributed to Peter. Scholars accredit the majority of the twenty-one letters in the Bible to Paul: fourteen of them. We know the other seven as ‘Catholic letters’ or universal letters. Those seven are ascribed one to James, two to Peter, three to John, and one to Jude.

The persons whose names are assigned to these letters did not necessarily write them. Paul, for example, wrote only seven of the fourteen letters that are listed under his name. Often a text in the Bible gains in status and rank if you can associate it with a famous writer. Very likely Peter did not write the letters that bear his name. Scholars also question whether the same person wrote these two letters.

A letter contains typical characteristics. It has a sender, an addressee, identifies a motive, and contains a clear beginning and ending. Yet many ‘letters’ in the Second Testament don’t have those features. Often a letter does not address itself to a particular audience (like Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians) and in other cases the letter does not identify the sender (as in the Letter to the Hebrews). Without 1 Peter’s clear beginning and distinct closure the text becomes rather impersonal. We really cannot call it a true letter. It sounds more like a plea. It reads like an ongoing admonition. Scholars often call it a homily or a sermon. It represents a distinct style of writing in the Bible.

The contents of 1 Peter expand on the first traditions in the very early period of Christianity. The letter encourages the first believers who faced persecution. It reflects on the deeper meaning of their baptism and emphasizes that through his or her suffering a Christian can find bliss. The text reflects on finding **joy** in the midst of **suffering**. The author revisits this paradox repeatedly. Baptism implies a new way of life, a ‘Christian style of life’ (v. 16) and everything it implies. One of those implications is: **as a Christian** one has to be on the defensive. A Christian must be accountable at all times: “When someone asks you where hope in your life finds its basis, be prepared to give an answer”. A Christian must be ready to answer just Christ himself answered accepted accountability.

Notes

CONTEMPLATIO (contemplate)

It is noteworthy that people often meet resistance when they commit themselves to a good and noble cause that is based on Christian conviction. Their conduct easily provokes hatred and enmity. Peter even calls it 'suffering'. How can this be? Why do Christians constantly have to justify their actions' when they commit themselves to do what is good'? These are the questions Peter addresses in this section of his letter. This is a common theme that reflects the core of Christianity. We know this from the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:10)

Peter's letter exhorts Christians to persevere in the midst of suffering. Take as your model Him who suffered so much for us. "Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit", (18) and "... has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God" (22). His death is unique. It brought reconciliation, not only for Christians but also for people well before his time: "the spirits in prison" (19). Jesus' 'descending into Hell' coincides with his Ascension.

We must to accept suffering, not because it would be fun, but because we participate in Christ's suffering that way, which ultimately will give us eternal life. This 'suffering for others' and for the benefit of others (serving as an example for Christians) is preferable to 'suffering you deserve'.

Notes

Peter recalls 'the days of Noah'. Those days serve as example for the sinners of the past. We are saved today from the same waters as the waters of the Flood from which a few individuals were saved. That water prefigures the baptismal water. In contrast to the many who lost their lives in the Flood we recognize the many who found redemption in baptism.

The Christian faith displays absurdities. It is said that the core of faith finds its basis in paradoxes: 'apparent' contradictions. Words and expressions are placed together that appear to be each other's opposite. Why do Christians call the day during which we commemorate Jesus' suffering and death 'good' and refer to it as 'Good Friday'? Some call that statement a 'divine paradox'.

Noteworthy for the paradoxes we find expressed in faith is: they sound like contradictions while in fact they bring 'unity' and present 'solutions'. For example, that what appears weak conquers what claims to be strong. To put it in another way: in faith we do not place one thing opposite another, but we note that one cannot find full meaning without the other. You cannot choose for one or the other. The two complement each other and then contrasts disappear. For Christians the cross represents the best-known paradox. It represents death as well as life, suffering but also exaltation. We hardly can think of a more extreme contrast. The Gospel speaks about dying that one may to live: 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit'. (Jn 12:24) 1Peter also uses a paradox like this: when the Christian suffers he or she is considered blessed.

Notes

<intermezzo>

COLLATIO (sharing)

- Suffering exists for people who deserve it and punishment or penalty can atone for it. Yet we know of suffering one does not deserve. The letter calls it 'guiltless suffering'. Explore to see whether you find examples of undeserved suffering in your own life. Have there been times when you thought: why does this have to happen to me? Do I really deserve this? How did you manage to keep going in spite of it?

- What consequences result from baptism? Ideally, what will one's style of life look like after baptism? What, hopefully, would one notice in the life style of one who has been baptized? What does being baptized mean for you yourself?

- Peter's letter declares: "If someone asks you what the basis is for your hope, always be ready to give an honest answer". How would you answer? On what is hope based for you? How do you show that in the way you live?

ORATIO (praying)

How can you put the following in your own words?

May we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, carried by the love of God our Father, and in unity with Jesus Christ, pursue our journey together and witness to the hope that lives within us.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their own words based on the text above.

CREATIO (to create)

Working in a small group you need the following for this task: a camera or telephone with a camera, water in any way, shape, or form, and props as needed for the execution of your project.

Water is paradoxical. It is both life-giving and destructive; it is a symbol of hope and new life but also of darkness and deep despair. Many artists and moviemakers use this paradoxical symbolism. Contemporary video artist, Bill Viola, is an example. In his works he uses water in various ways. Often he also incorporates Christian symbolism. Below (left) you see a frame taken from one of his works, titled *Emergence*. Masolini's 15th century fresco (below, right) inspired Viola. You can view clips of the video on YouTube (Search "Bill Viola Emergence" on Google for instance.)



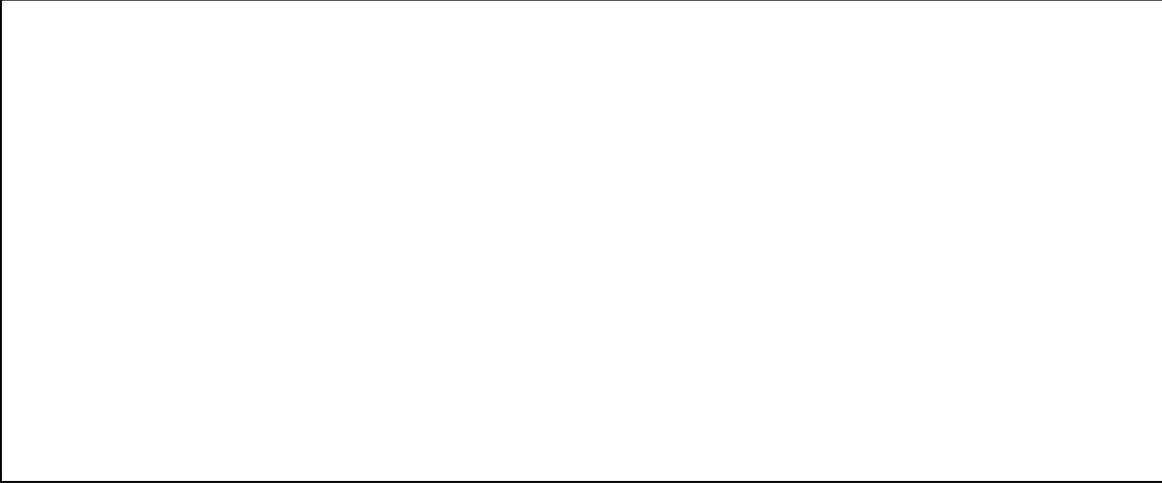
You have the following **assignment** for today: make a **video**, either a movie or slideshow, in which **water** plays an important role. Try to portray water's paradoxical characteristics or use water to depict what 'baptism' means for you. Assign the different tasks in the group. Who will create the story

line? Who will provide the stage props? Do you need actors? What characters will they portray? Do you need music and/or spoken text? Who will do the editing? Who will put the clip on the page for [facebook.con/AmbassadorsWWB?](https://www.facebook.com/AmbassadorsWWB/)

Notes

OPERATIO (to act)

- Try to set time aside this month to pay attention to and reflect on people's anguish.
What practical contributions can you make to assist people who are suffering?



- We challenge you to daily reflect on your own baptism: how does your life reflect your baptism?



Share your experiences with others at the next session.