

Dear Friends

The challenge comes in different ways, for some it is aggressive for others it might be pleading. However, it is always a moment when you feel less able to give a response. Sometimes, you don't have the words, at others you lack the courage and quite often the question simply floors you. In any case we feel inadequate on these occasions and we struggle to make a response. What proof do you have for that? It's the question that at once challenges our understanding of our faith. We might struggle to remember what we were taught in Sunday School or in our Confirmation Class. We often want to run a mile and our brains turn to mush and the answer we give seems far from convincing.

Well, worry not; just by getting someone to ask that question you have probably done really well. The first thing we need to remember is that you cannot give proof. There is no watertight argument that can persuade someone to believe. I know so, because I once spent hours late one night to early morning trying to convince somebody about the existence of God. They agreed in the end, but later, my 'conquest' went back to being an unbeliever. The truth is that the question is framed wrongly; it ought to say what evidence is there for what you say?

In fact many of the things we accept as fact cannot be proved. We can't prove that William the Conqueror defeated Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Evolution remains a theory (much though the members of 5T4J have tried to persuade me otherwise) and people still dispute whether we went to the moon in 1969. In all of these we can only present the evidence we have to support our arguments. In each of these cases, there is much by way of documents telling the story, or fossils that help us move to conclusions which we might then agree has proved the case. However, it is always down to each one of us to accept the arguments and conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence.

A simple way of illustrating this is to reflect briefly on the Resurrection of Jesus. In order to help people understand this we would point out two important facts. First of all, it would seem that the tomb Jesus was laid in was empty. Visits to the tomb by the believers and the inability for the authorities to show a body, support this. The second is that quite a number of those believers, tell of first hand experiences of seeing him alive including five hundred people on one occasion. This is what the case for the Resurrection is based on.

However, important as this is, these facts are not the most important or the most impressive evidence that Jesus is alive. Right from the beginning followers of Jesus clearly felt that their own encounter with the risen Jesus was the key factor in all of this. Thomas would not believe his compatriots testimony, only after seeing Jesus himself did he believe. Paul describes his own encounter as one 'out of time' in that Paul met Jesus well after the other disciples.

Indeed the most compelling evidence about the Resurrection is the number of people who claimed to have met with and experienced the risen Jesus. We see this in the Acts of the Apostles, which tells the story of how the Church grew and the vast numbers of people who came to believe that Jesus was alive. Beyond the first believers we hear of 3,000 people coming to be part of the Church on the Day of Pentecost just 50 days after the Resurrection. A few weeks later, another 5,000 people were added into their company. Then slowly the good news spreads out and people all over the world began to have the same experience and conviction that Jesus was alive. The Bible shows clearly that this was down to them receiving the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost the promise Jesus made to the disciples that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. We are told, that gathered for prayer and worship that Sunday morning, they heard a sound of a mighty wind, tongues of flame appeared on their heads and they spoke in a heavenly language. The Holy Spirit is God's invisible presence and he lives in those who believe in Jesus. This Spirit gives us the conviction that Jesus is alive. It doesn't end with the bible though, over the years of the Church there have been many many times people have come to the same understanding. Of course in all these stories, the details are different but all have the same conviction, Jesus is alive. Right down to today people are still meeting with Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit and knowing the joy that comes as a result of this.

I myself can testify to this, though I was brought up in the church I lacked any great conviction of the realities of Jesus. Then I went to a prayer meeting where I was prayed over and was filled with the Holy Spirit. My life changed from that point and I have had many more encounters with the Spirit of God. All of them add to my conviction that Jesus is alive and that is made real to me every day.

The truth is that we are the Ambassadors for the Christian Faith. It is our testimony to the life of Jesus in us that really counts. Back in my youth, it was often asked, "If you were on trial for your life because you were a follower of Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Over the years there have been many people who clearly show the new life that Jesus alone can give. Many people who have been prepared to die rather than to deny this. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were more people who paid that price for their faith than at any time since the Early Church.

So the question remains, "Are you filled with God's Holy Spirit and does your life display the evidence that Jesus is alive, that your life shows that you are fully committed to Him?" Remember that our actions speak louder than our words. If you're not sure about this, then maybe you need to think about asking for prayer so this life might begin in you. If you are sure, then seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not just once but every day of your life, then you cannot fail to proclaim the life of Jesus as well.

May the Lord richly bless you.