

3rd Sunday of Easter

Acts 3:13-19; Psalm 4:2-9; I John 2:1-5; Luke 24:35-48

Have you ever supported a cause that you are passionate about, a cause that is near and dear to your heart? Have you ever used your own resources and skills to raise awareness of a societal issue that will not fix or change itself? If so, you have been an advocate and been involved in advocacy.

“The term advocacy encompasses the actions one takes in order to effect change for a cause they are invested in. Advocate has many synonyms from champion to proponent to crusader” (*Salsa, an on-line advocacy resource*).

According to the dictionary, Advocacy is defined as “any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.”

You may or may not have participated in an advocacy movement, but I imagine that most of us are aware, at least in part, of the importance of advocacy and the value of having an advocate, especially when it comes to issues you have some invested interest in and/or are passionate about.

With this in mind, hear again the apostle John’s words in our second reading from I John, “My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one.”

“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate.” Friends, all of us have sinned. Thus, each of us has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. There is no greater, or more passionate, or more invested, or more compassionate, or more powerful advocate than Jesus!

Moreover, the cause which is dear to God’s heart is YOU!! **The greatest advocacy effort and campaign the world has ever seen, heard of, or known is Jesus - the manifestation of the love of God for you and me** - for the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God and one another. God sent Jesus into the world to advocate for us. Jesus humbled himself being born in a stable that he would understand us completely and be tempted in every way that we are so that he could totally and unconditionally advocate on our behalf.

Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. God then raised Jesus from the dead that his advocacy would bring forgiveness and demonstrate to the world the height, depth, length, and breadth of the love of God for you and me. Jesus advocates for our life, forgiveness, and salvation – our eternal union with God. We have an advocate, Jesus, who never ceases to advocate on our behalf. There is no greater advocate in the universe. Jesus is totally for us and continues to intercede and advocate on our behalf.

The apostle Paul says it this way, “ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31-39).

Nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus because in and through Jesus’ advocacy he gave his ALL for us. He gave up his life. He suffered for our sins. He died on a cross meant for us - as consequence for our sins and the sins of the world. The Bible tells us, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is the unfathomable mystery of love and mercy revealed in the advocacy of Jesus for you and me. God did not leave us in our sin and separation from God. Instead, Jesus’ advocacy had the purpose and goal to right the wrong of Adam’s sin. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Again, the purpose of Jesus’ advocacy was and is to forgive us of our sins and to unite us once again with God – to right the wrong (separation and alienation from God) of Adam’s sin.

Jesus advocacy didn’t end on the cross. Instead, God raised Jesus from the dead to defeat the power of sin and death and the lies and manipulation of the Enemy. The desire of the Enemy is to separate us from God and from one another. “The Enemy came to steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10a). The desire

and invested passionate advocacy of God in Christ is to forgive us our sins and reconcile us with God. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Jesus, our true advocate, accomplished this through his suffering, death and resurrection. Praise God!

The Biblical term for Advocate has within it an image of one who pleads for another in a court of law. St. Augustine writes of Jesus advocacy, "If you should have a case to be tried before a judge and should procure an advocate, you would be accepted by the lawyer and he would plead your case to the best of his ability. If, before he has finished his plea, you should hear that he is to be the judge, how you would rejoice, because he could be your judge, who shortly before was your lawyer."

After John tells us Jesus is our advocate he also states the Jesus is the expiation (or atonement) for our sins. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Our sinful broken condition could never cure or fix itself. This is why we desperately needed an advocate. This is why we desperately need an advocate - and not any advocate, but the very One who created us and loves us beyond measure - the very God-man, Jesus, who offered his life on a cross for us. Through his sacrifice, Jesus atoned for our sins and the sins of the world. The New Revised Standard Bible translates 1 John 2:2 as "and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." According to Catholic Encyclopedia, "The verb "atone", from the adverbial phrase "at one", at first meant to reconcile, or make "at one"; from this it came to denote the action by which such reconciliation was effected, e.g. satisfaction for an offense or an injury. Hence, the Atonement is the satisfaction of Christ, whereby God and the world are reconciled or made to be at one. For God indeed was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

The great mystery of Jesus' advocacy is that as our judge, Jesus willingly and lovingly stepped down from his judgement seat and took our place as the accused. Jesus bore the burden and price of our sins. He, who is the very Author of life, died and rose again that we might have life and life everlasting.

Our advocate and Risen Lord, Jesus, is ALL in for us. Jesus is ALL in for you! Again, we are the cause, we are the great concern of God's heart for which he championed the great advocacy movement of salvation history and salvation today.

St. Paul wrote, “For in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (I Colossians 1:19-20).

Our Gospel reading from Luke is very similar to our reading from the Gospel of John last week. Like John, Luke brings us to the evening of the first Easter. The evening of the very day Jesus rose from the dead. Like John, Luke describes Jesus advocating for his disciples soon after his resurrection. John shares Jesus advocating for Mary who stood weeping outside the tomb. Luke shares Jesus advocating for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. In both cases, their eyes were opened to the reality of the Risen Lord’s presence and each returned to the other disciples gathered in a locked room to share their astonishing news.

Like John, Luke shares that Jesus entered the room where his disciples had locked the doors out of fear and stood “in their midst.” As I mentioned last week, this is the same Greek word that means “in the middle.” The Risen Jesus came right in the middle of their awe, wonder, amazement, questions, and fears and advocates for their peace. The Risen Jesus is with us too. Our advocate comes right in the middle of our lives, right in the middle of our questions, fears, anxieties, awe, doubt and wonder to advocate for our peace – to bring us His peace. Like John, Luke reveals that the first words of the Risen Jesus to the disciples behind locked doors were “Peace be with you.”

Our advocate knows we have struggles this side of heaven, so He wants us to never forget that He is eternally and unconditionally for us and with us. There is no barrier too thick or lock too strong, or sin too great that God’s love cannot penetrate or walk through to bring us forgiveness, healing and peace. Our advocate is with us always and will never stop pursuing our healing, forgiveness, and union with God. Our advocate, the Risen Jesus, will never stop being the champion of our lives. Praise God!

That Jesus is our advocate and champion of our lives is a beautiful thing. Never forget it! The Holy Spirit is united with Jesus as our advocate as well. Yet, too many people do not know they have an advocate and a champion for the cause of their lives. Too many people feel alone, burdened and without hope. As Jesus called the disciples to be his witnesses to the world, we too are called to join God’s great advocacy campaign. We are invited to join Jesus in advocating for others - that more and more people would come to know the love, mercy

and peace of God - that every infant, child, youth and adult would know God is for them. **What a difference an advocate can make, especially when our advocate is the Author of life and the lover of our souls.**

Who needs your advocacy? Who would benefit from knowing how Jesus has advocated for you? Who needs to know Jesus is advocating for them no matter where they are or what they have done? Jesus is for us and that makes all the difference.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve