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"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1.8)

What does Acts teach about Christian witness? Peter's first recorded witness to the Jerusalemites referred to a public event fresh to their memory, one of gross miscarriage of justice: "*Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power... as you yourselves know-this man... you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law*" (2.22-23). He went on, "*Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified*" (2.36), the hearers were confronted with the victim of this injustice and how God was with him. No wonder that "*when they heard this, they were cut to the heart*", and it was at this point that Peter offered hope and deliverance: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (2.37-38). Peter was not talking about an ethereal original sin, but confronting the audience with a specific guilt and concrete victim and in that confrontation with the victim the victimizer found God, judging but also forgiving.

We have two options about Christian witness today. One option is to repeat the same historical events which, being from the remote past, are necessarily abstract. The other is to believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, while historical, has a significance across time and culture, and therefore to seek to speak about specific guilt that we are implicated in and concrete victims that we, wittingly or not, have created. What does this mean? Our lives are enmeshed in a web of relationships: between parents and children, managers and the managed, clients and service-providers, with people from other nations, and with people from other social groups whom we do not know but affect by our votes. We have varying degrees of choice and power in these relationships but sometimes injustice and violence (physical or not) is done, through ignorance, callousness, connivance, or willful participation. We are often victimizers in one situation and victims in another. I would like to suggest that Christian witness consists in confrontation and wrestling with one's own past, including the environment in which one is soaked and which shapes one's reflexes, naming the deeds and attitudes that dehumanize others (and therefore ourselves), and proclaiming the possibility of redemption and reconciliation. The victim-victimizer relationship occurs more often than we dare admit, though admittedly quite common place and may not appear horrific.

This reading of the meaning of Christian witness sheds some new light on the passage at hand. I can only give an example. Why did not Jesus simply say, "You will be my witnesses in all the earth"? The answer must be that confrontation of specific pasts and ghosts must necessarily involve concrete places and histories: The (then) recent miscarriage of the justice in Jerusalem (Acts 4), the generations old enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews (Acts 8), and Rome which pretends to a peace and justice built upon loot, blood, and injustice (Acts 28).

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace and make us peace makers, not a peace that evades the past but one that dares to look at it. Amen