

"You are witnesses of these things"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, Coach Grant Teaff wrote a book called **"I Believe."** It's about a young man who was once the world's greatest pole-vaulter. His name is Brian Sternberg.

In 1963, Brian was a sophomore at the University of Washington. He was not only the world's best pole-vaulter, but also America's trampoline champion. Teaff says:

"Word around track was that Brian Sternberg was the most self-centered, young athlete to come along ...in a long time."

Teaff tells how he watched Brian perform the day he broke the world's record. He says:

"The thing that caught my eye was his poise, self-confidence, and... that he never smiled."

The next day at breakfast, Teaff was stunned when he read the newspaper headline:

"Brian Sternberg Injured."

*Brian had been working out, alone, in the gym. He did a triple somersault and came down on the trampoline ...off-center. His neck hit the edge of the frame, snapping it and leaving him totally paralyzed, able to move, only ...his eyes and his mouth. Brian was left a helpless, hopeless cripple, and ...a very... very... **very**... **bitter**... young man.*

Five years later, Coach Teaff saw Brian again. It was at a convention for coaches and athletes at Estes Park, Colorado.

*Once everyone was seated, the auditorium was totally darkened. Suddenly, a movie projector lit a large, panoramic screen. There was Brian Sternberg ...racing down the runway, executing that record-breaking pole-vault. Every coach and athlete in the room **"oohed" and "aahed."***

Then the auditorium went totally dark again... except for a single, brilliant spotlight, illuminating a single chair, with arms, on the, otherwise ...bare, stark stage. It looked like some tractor-beam from a spaceship, locked onto that chair.

Then, out of the stage-shadows, came a huge, nationally-known, football player named Wes Wilmer. In his arms was what looked like a large ragdoll. Its long arms and legs hung limp at its sides and flopped this way and that, as Wes Wilmer walked across the stage. The ragdoll was six-foot, three-inch Brian Sternberg, all 87 pounds of him.

Wes placed him in the chair and carefully, propped him up with pillows, so he wouldn't fall over. Then, in a raspy voice, Brian Sternberg began to talk:

"My friends-Oh, I pray to God that what has happened to me, will never happen to one of you. I pray that you will never know the humiliation, the shame... of not being able to perform one ...single ...human ...act. Oh, I pray to God you will never know the pain I live with everyday. It is my hope and my prayer that what has happened to me will never happen to one of you. Unless, my friends ...that's what it takes for you to put God ...in the center of your life."

The impact of Brian's words on that particular crowd was absolutely electrifying.

*No one there will **ever** forget them.*

*I don't know of a single story that illustrates so powerfully & pointedly the lesson in today's Scriptures. In today's Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Luke, Jesus instructs his disciples to be his **witnesses to all nations**, beginning right there in Jerusalem. And that's exactly what we find Peter doing in the first reading. And that's exactly what we find Brian Sternberg doing before all those coaches and athletes. He said:*

“Oh, I pray to God... that what has happened to me, will never happen to one of you... Unless, my friends ...that’s what it takes for you to put God ...in the center of your life.”

WITNESSING to Jesus is more than just telling people about the life of this great person, who lived 2,000 years ago. Anyone can do that.

WITNESSING to Jesus is more than just testifying that Jesus is risen. The soldiers guarding the tomb did that.

WITNESSING to Jesus is testifying by our lives that the power of the risen Jesus has touched us and has transformed us...affecting our life-style.

WITNESSING to Jesus is letting Jesus speak and act through us.

That is precisely what Brian Sternberg was doing on that empty stage in Estes Park, Colorado. Before his tragic accident, he was a self-centered, arrogant athlete. Immediately after it, he was a bitter, broken, bewildered person...much like the apostles after the Crucifixion.

BUT, and there’s that proverbial **BUT** in life again—**SOME**thing profound happened to him. **SOME**thing beautiful happened to him. **SOME**thing transformed him, like what happened to the apostles, themselves.

**“What exactly happened to him? What transformed him?” you ask.
Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

SOMEone introduced him to Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ ‘happened’ to him.** Beginning with that introduction, the power of the risen Jesus touched Brian and began to transform him. The result was that Brian became an inspiring, living witness to the resurrection.

*The most powerful force in the world is someone touched and transformed
by the power of the Risen Christ!*

Most often, we do not set out to **‘give witness to Jesus,’** like some TV evangelist. The last thing on Brian Sternberg’s mind, when he was propped up in that chair on that stage in Estes Park, was that he was **‘giving witness to Jesus.’** All he was doing was sharing the deepest part of himself and his convictions about life, as he knew it, with a group of brother & sister-athletes & coaches.

So-o, in summary: witnessing to Jesus is testifying by our lives that the power of the risen Jesus has touched us and transformed us. It’s doing what an 87-pound rag doll did on an empty stage in Estes Park, Colorado. It is letting Jesus **speak and act through us** to other people.

I close with this prayer:

“No matter how beautifully expressed, abstract ideas rarely ‘move’ people. BUT—let a person come forward, a living person, capable of speaking to the heart; let truth flow from that person’s life, and let that person’s power be matched by an equal gift of love: then people will listen and the dawn of better days... will brighten our skies!”

*May our Almighty God, our Abba, once again bless each of you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*