

"Why didn't you tell me it was so beautiful?" A young boy who had been blind from birth had just been operated on. The new procedure offered the possibility of sight for this young boy who had never seen the light of day. As the parents waited for the doctor to remove the patches which had covered his eyes since surgery, they were uncertain about what his response would be. Blinking his eyes, adjusting to the sights and colors around him, the boy suddenly began to take it all in. Full of excitement, he said to his parents, "Why didn't you tell me it was so beautiful?" —

This is the work of evangelism. It is the business of helping persons open their eyes and see the world as they have never seen it before. It is not the pressuring of people to come to Church. Such pressure is in the long run nonproductive and basically unchristian. Rather, evangelism is the introduction of persons to a new way of living, a new way of relating, a new way of perceiving the meaning of existence.

The undelivered message: George Sweeting, in his book *The No-Guilt Guide for Witnessing*, tells us of John Currier who in 1949 was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm near Nashville, Tennessee. In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died. Ten years went by. Then a state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man.

Sweeting concluded that story by asking, "Would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message—the most important in your life—and year after year the urgent message was never delivered?" — We who have heard the Good News and experienced freedom through Christ are responsible to proclaim it to others still enslaved by sin. Are we doing all we can to make sure that people get the message?

"People need no proofs for the existence of God if we are witnesses." Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was one of the most influential religious thinkers of our time. In one of his writings, he said these startling words: "If there are no witnesses there is no God to be met.... For God to be present we have to be witnesses... There are no proofs for the existence of God; there are only witnesses." Did you know that our English word "martyr" comes from a Greek word which simply means "to witness"? The word became associated with death because that was the end result of one's witnessing during the first centuries of the Christian era. This is not to suggest that God's existence depends solely on our witnessing.

The point here is that God's Reality for us, God's relevance in our lives, God's reality in the world, is dependent upon our bearing witness to Him. So God should not be found at the end of a philosophical or theological argument, but in the midst of life.

The transition from "witness" to "martyr" is more than linguistic. It is life. Do you know that the first-century Christians were called atheists, immoral and cannibals by their enemies? They were called "atheists" because they refused to accept the popular gods of the day; "immoral" because they amazed the world by the way in which they loved one another; and "cannibals" because they regularly partook of the Body and Blood of Christ, even at great risk! And it is still going on.

Witnessing by living During the American Civil War, President Lincoln had a strapping athletic young man as his secretary. In those days before office machinery, such a man would literally be pushing a pen or pencil. This particular man was not happy about it. He wanted to get out where the action was - on the battlefield. He wanted to go out and do great things for his country. He was quite willing to die for his country. So he kept complaining to Lincoln about the women's work he was doing, when he could be in uniform confronting the enemy.

After hearing the usual complaint one day, Lincoln stared at him, rubbed his hands in his beard and said in his philosophical way, "Young man, as I see it, you are quite willing to die for your country, but you are not ready to live for it." — Martyrs (just a Greek word for witnesses) give their lives *by dying or by living*. [Frank Michalic, Tonic for the Heart; quoted by Fr. Botelho.]

Being a witness: A group of young people from many nations was discussing how the Gospel might be spread. They talked of propaganda, of literature, of all the ways of disseminating the Gospel in the twentieth century.

Then a girl from Africa spoke. "When we want to take Christianity to one of our villages," she said, "we don't send them books. We take a Christian family and send them to live in the village and they make the village Christian by living there." [William Barclay; quoted by Fr. Botelho.]

What's really important? A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting point for the 100-yard dash. At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy's cry. They slowed down and paused.

Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for ten minutes. [Author unknown; quoted by Fr. Botelho]