

Scripture Study

Fifth Sunday of Easter – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Acts 9:26-31

(Psalm 22:26-28,30-32)

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

Overview of the Gospel:

- The setting for this Sunday's Gospel is just after the Last Supper discourse in the upper room (John 13:1—14:31). It is speculated that, after leaving the upper room, this part of Jesus' discourse may have been delivered at the Temple gates (where there was an elaborate engraving of grapes and vines), or in the vineyard near the Kidron Valley, on the way to the Mount of Olives, where the Garden of Gethsemane was located.
- In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is often spoken of as a vine or a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:9-17; Jer 2:21, 5:10-11; Ez 15:2-8, 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1, etc.), as did Jesus (Mt 21:33-46).
- This Gospel reading, however, is much more personal than previous uses of this figure since Jesus speaks of himself as the vine and we, his members, as the branches. St. Paul also uses a similar idea in his description of the true Israel as the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 3:9, 12:12-26; Eph 4:15-16). Thus our spiritual survival is dependent upon our connection to him—and to one another.
- Jesus is talking about two kinds of branches with a different kind of pruning for each. Those branches that are not bearing fruit are to be cut off all together, as they are useless and only serve to draw nourishment away from the fruitful branches. The fruitful branches are also pruned, but it is because they are already productive and pruning makes them even more so.

Questions:

- If the fruitful vine branches were human lives, what kinds of things are being pruned away? What pain would be associated with pruning? What tools? What spiritual fruit?
- Jesus repeats “remain in me”, “love” and “bear fruit”. How are these words related? What is the “fruit that will remain” (verse 16)?
- How do verses 9 and 12 tie together? How is love the essential dynamic of the Christian life (1 Cor 13)? How does your relationship with Jesus change once you start practicing his example of love?
- What is the link between obedience and prayer (verses 7 and 16. See also John 14:13-14)?
- As a branch on Christ's vine, how would you describe the fruit in your life: Grade A-1? Juicy? Green? Wormy? Why?
- Specifically, how would you rate yourself on laying down your life for your friends (verse 13)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 308, 755, 787, 1108, 1988, 2074

Closing prayer

“For Christ's Word in the first place cleanses us from errors, by instructing us (cf. Titus 1:9)...secondly, it purifies our hearts of earthly affections, filling them with desire for heavenly things...; finally, his Word purifies us with the strength of faith, for “he cleansed their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9).” ~St. Thomas Aquinas

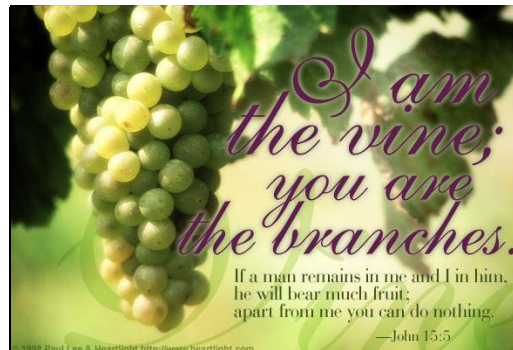
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

“He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit”

Scripture: *John 15:1-8*

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

Meditation: Why does Jesus speak of himself as the *true vine*? The image of the vine was a rich one for the Jews since the land of Israel was covered with numerous vineyards. It had religious connotations to it as well. Isaiah spoke of the house of Israel as “*the vineyard of the Lord*” (Isaiah 5:7). Jeremiah said



that God had planted Israel “*as his choice vine*” (Jeremiah 2:21). While the vine became a symbol of Israel as a nation, it also was used in the scriptures as a sign of degeneration. Isaiah’s prophecy spoke of Israel as a vineyard which “*yielded wild grapes*” (see Isaiah 5:1-7). Jeremiah said that Israel had become a “*degenerate and wild vine*” (Jeremiah 2:21). When Jesus calls himself the *true vine* he makes clear that no one can claim their spiritual inheritance through association with a particular people or bloodline. Rather, it is only through Jesus Christ that one can become grafted into the true “vineyard of the Lord”.

Jesus offers true life – the abundant life which comes from God and which results in great fruitfulness. How does the vine become fruitful? The vinedresser must carefully prune the vine before it can bear good fruit. Vines characteristically have two kinds of branches – those which bear fruit and those which don’t.

The non-bearing branches must be carefully pruned back in order for the vine to conserve its strength for bearing good fruit. Jesus used this image to describe the kind of life he produces in those who are united with him – the fruit of “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 14:17). Jesus says there can be no fruit in our lives apart from him. The fruit he speaks of here is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23).

There is a simple truth here: We are either fruit-bearing or non-fruit-bearing. There is no in-between. But the bearing of healthy fruit requires drastic pruning. The Lord promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him and allow him to purify us. Do you trust in the Lord’s abiding presence with you?

"Lord Jesus, may I be one with you in all that I say and do. Draw me close that I may glorify you and bear fruit for your kingdom. In flame my heart with your love and remove from it anything that would make me ineffective or unfruitful in loving and serving you as my All."

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