

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER–2024

Betty was driving home from one of her business trips in Montana when she saw an elderly Cherokee woman walking on the side of the road. She stopped the car and asked the woman if she would like a ride. With a silent nod of thanks, the woman got into the car. Betty tried in vain to make a bit of small talk with the woman, but she just sat silently. Finally, noticing a brightly colored box on the seat next to Betty, the elderly woman asked, “What in box?” Betty looked down at the box and said, “It's a bottle of 20 year old whiskey. I got it for my husband.” The Cherokee woman was silent for another moment or two. Then speaking with the quiet wisdom of an elder, she said, “You made good trade.”

Once again, we have before us a powerful and meaningful image of Jesus' relationship with us and we to him. It shows the real connectedness between him and us. While there is a distinction between the vine and the branches, in reality there is one plant. In the case of our Family of Parishes, the vine is 17.2 miles long. There are a number of implications that we can pull out of this image and what Jesus says about it.

The first is that we know at least in our hearts that we need Jesus and that have to live in, with for him and that he lives in with and for us. We know that if we separate ourselves from him, like a branch that is separated from the vine, we will never come to what God wants for us, that is, true and lasting happiness and completeness.

The second implication is just as important as the first. Jesus tell us once again that the bottom line of it all of this is the production of fruits that will last, that is, bringing the message of the Gospel of our world.. Using this image, Jesus is not only speaking the truth about our need for him, but according to his plan, the need he has for us. Let us for a moment try to imagine a grape vine without the branches. As the branches cannot produce fruit if they are separated from the vine, neither can the vine produce its grapes without the branches. The image of the vine teaches us how Jesus really depends upon us. Jesus has placed all in our hands. We are to continue the work of making him present in our world. This is the work of the Church and close to home, our Family of Parishes..

There is a third implication. The vine has many branches. In Jesus the branches are united one to the other. Again and again, we are reminded that we live our faith in community and in our day to day dealings with real flesh and blood people, some we get along with, others not. Without this living this truth, there really is no faith; there is no Church and the work of Jesus does not get done.

The image of the vine, along with the other Gospel images such as the image of the Good Shepherd that we heard last week, is a beautiful image and the message is very clear. These images are helps to motivate us to live as God wants us to the real life situations and events that make up our lives. As I like to say, we have to put flesh on this by the way we live our lives, what we do and what we say.

We do this our homes; with our families and friends; in our work place; when we are busy, resting and enjoying ourselves. What help us and what is necessary if our life of prayer. Each time we go off by ourselves to pray or each time we gather to pray in common, as we are today, we are strengthened, consoled, forgiven, encouraged by the Lord and each other, and then we are sent out to make the Gospel of lived reality. We are called to give witness to reality of the risen Lord Jesus who is in our midst, inviting others to share in that wonderful friendship.

And so, how we live this and put this into practice is what is important. We are called to speak and act in a way that people who know us and even those who don't know us, know who we are; that by our actions they will know we are Catholics and that we are proud of who we are; that we are not ashamed of our faith and what we hold as sacred because it comes to us from our God who is a loving Father who wants the best for us. This means at times that we have to go against the grain and maybe even endure being ridiculed when we talk about such things as the sacredness of life from the moment of conception to natural death, or the sacredness of marriage and family as God intended, or when we speak up and say that the death penalty is against the law of Christ, or when we speak of the responsibility that we all have to share what we have with those less fortunate, and so on. This is how we fill find true peace of mind and heart and how we will come to see that life really does make sense in the midst of all that seems to say that it doesn't.

The fourth and last implication is that we hear Jesus say that from time to time we need some pruning; we are works in progress. And so, we might need to get rid of those things that get in the way of being more fruitful; we need to see where and on what we might be wasting our time and energy. According to Jesus, leaves are not enough. Remember that commercial about "Where's the beef?" Jesus asks, "Where's the fruit?"

Let us continue praying and staying together so that we may continue to give witness that Jesus is truly risen and that he really is with us by our care and concern for others, especially our brothers and sisters we don't know and who are going through some tragic and terrible things. We can positively make a difference if our lives more consistently and authentically reflected the spirit of Jesus So, let us not settle for a mediocre life. May we continue to cultivate our relationship with Jesus. In this we will continue to find the true purpose and meaning of our lives and make a difference in the lives of others. Whatever we are going through at this time, including the challenges of the Road to Renewal, we will come out on the other end okay.

Bottom line, let us remembers that we need Jesus, he need us, that we are all in this together and that we are all works in progress. May the peace of the risen Jesus live in our hearts and in the hearts of those we love.