

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER–2021

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. I came up with several implications that we can pull out of this image and what Jesus says and make them a part of who we are and what we do.

The first is that we know at least in our hearts, even though sometimes we don't live, that we need Jesus and that we have to live in him and he in us. We know that if we separate ourselves from him, like a branch that is separated from the vine, we will never come to that true and lasting happiness and completeness.

The second implication is just as important as the first. Jesus tells us once again that the bottom line of it all is production of fruits that will last. 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.

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 reality or concreteness, there 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 help to motivate us to live as God wants us to in the real life situations and events that make up our lives. As I like to say, we have to put flesh and blood on these words in our daily lives. We have to live them in our homes; with our families and friends; in our work place; when we are busy, resting and enjoying ourselves. 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 the reality of the risen Lord Jesus who is in our midst and who will lead us to the Father and offer us the opportunity to share in that wonderful friendship.

And so, how we live this and put this into practice is what is important. It is only when we live our faith through our words, works and deeds that we are fulfilling our role as branches on the vine. We are called to speak and act in a way that people who 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 when we stand up for the sacredness of the gift of our sexuality and 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.

We receive all that is good because we are joined with Jesus the true vine; because of that, we the branches, will produce bountifully in our lives and the lives of others those fruits of the Spirit, among which are joy, peace, patience and hope. This is how we will 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 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 are 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 always try to remain close to Jesus the vine; in doing that we will remain connected to each other and together we will continue the mission of Jesus, bringing only good things to all of God's beloved children, who are in truth and in deed, our brothers and sisters.

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. Imagine how much our lives and the lives of others would change if we found our identity in our connection to Jesus. How many lives could we impact if our lives 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 find the true purpose and meaning of our lives. And, whatever we are going through, we will come out on the other end okay. May the peace of Jesus live in our hearts and in the hearts of those we love.