

Homily. 5th Sunday of Easter. Year. B. 27/28 April 2024.

John's gospel text is part of the teaching and final instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples at the last supper. After washing their feet and asking them to serve others as he served them they shared his last meal, our 1st Eucharist. This weekend we've heard the heart of Jesus metaphor of the vine and branches. It reminds me somewhat of St. Paul's description of the Church as body of Christ. Jesus is the head and all of us are the members of his body, guided by him and needing each others gifts.

Tonight/today Jesus says that he is the true vine and we the branches drawing the sap of Divine life and nourishment from him. The aim is that we be fruitful in the world, living and sharing his message and ministry down through history. He tells us that cut off from him we can do nothing useful to promote or further God's plan. He presents God the Father as the vine dresser, the wise and loving One who prunes us so that we can fruitfully achieve God's purpose. Again, Jesus added that any fruitless branches will be cut away and burnt for they're only drinking up his goodness, taking it away from those seeking to live and nourish others with the fruit of juicy grapes and the wine of hope, healing and joy.

Thanks to the 2nd reading the meaning of this message is made clear. Our love and service isn't to be just words, talk and nice intentions, but something real and active. Our loving and service is the real proof that we are living in Jesus. This also means that our conscience can be calm and quiet and that we never need to be afraid in God's presence. Whatever we ask of God will be given to serve our mission. What we must do is believe in Jesus in our hearts and love one another just like Jesus has

modelled and told us to do. In this way God lives in us and we become alive in God to our truest selves and for our right purpose in this life.

This reading of the vine and branches is the one that I chose over 39 years ago as the gospel for my ordination Mass. Back then I knew about the connection of this teaching to the last supper and the importance of letting Jesus' life flow into me so that I could be fruitful in the ways God desired. To some small degree I understood that constant pruning in life would be needed if fruitfulness was going to happen. Of course, I had no grasp of how any of this might be brought about in time. I simply stepped forwards in faith. I'm sure that this is very true for all of us.

Our lives of faith are like a great adventure, demanding much from us, but offering even more to us if we are constant on this journey. Listening faithfully as best we can to the voice of Jesus, trying hard to stick to the vine, taking him and his life into ourselves and then with the Lord's help aiming to put our words and intentions into action and service is what makes us fruitful in ways we could have ever seen or even imagined when we first set forth on our adventure of faith with Christ.

Shocks, stresses and strains do come our way and with them flow into us joys, hopes and meaning. This is the Pascal mystery unfolding itself in our personal lives, in company with our Church faith community. It's all of this that we offer here to God in the form of bread and wine, asking for it and so for us to be blessed, changed, transformed. In return God gives us the very best gift of all; God's own life in Christ flowing into the veins and heart of the branch that we are: fruit for us to be shared with the world.