

Reflection, May 2, 2021

Jn. 15:1-8

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Today, we celebrate the Fifth Sunday of Easter. The Church, as you well know, has its own special way of calculating time. We made our way through 40 days of Lent to arrive at Easter; now we are numbering the Sundays of Easter until we have passed through the 50 days before Pentecost. We are awaiting the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

In the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, we continue to follow the struggle of Paul to be recognized and accepted as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Understandably, some still feared this former persecutor of Christians. But, we are told, the Church was at peace in those days and Paul was protected by those who knew him.

When we move to the Gospel, we leave chronological time to enter the more mystical style of John. In John's account of the Gospel, Jesus introduces himself: *I am the true vine*, and my Father as the vine grower.

A bit later, he repeats: "I am the vine, you are the branches." We cannot afford to overlook the central point of all of this. The vine and branches, in human terms, refer to relationships, close relationships. Jesus, the teacher, repeats the familiar facts of natural growth ... the branch must remain attached to the vine, in order to live and bear fruit. So, we must remain in Christ.

Beneath this image, our human understanding of such close relationships is that they are based on love. From love, comes the fruitfulness of life. Love enables. Jesus makes this very clear when he states "... without me you can do nothing."

Who wants to try on their own? Jesus, the vine, is our lifeline, but there is no timeline. We are simply told: "Remain in me." A Pauline response to this challenge was: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13) We might not have that courage, but we know well, that we are not meant to wait and do nothing.

In the news, we hear daily of the great needs and crises in our country and in our world. The virus threatens all and yet some nations are especially vulnerable. We read and hear of devastating accidents and natural disasters. We are haunted by images of racist incidents and gun violence.

Simultaneously we hear of those who speak, write and act for peace, for truth and justice. We are offered opportunities to make our convictions known to legislators and to offer our support to those who actively work on behalf of justice and equality; to those who reject racial hatred, vindication, dishonesty and violence.

Such reflections lead us back to where we began. Jesus reminds the disciples and reminds us, with his words:

- "I am the true vine"... the source of life;

- “Remain in me as I remain in you;”
- “I am the vine, you are the branches;”
- “Whoever remains in me and I in them will bear much fruit;”
- “Without me you can do nothing.”

In the midst of these reflections, I was reminded of a thought from Pope Francis’ encyclical letter, “Fratelli Tutti” (“Sisters and Brothers All”). He speaks of our need for the “music of the Gospel.”

He writes:

“... If the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth.” (FT 277)

Jesus is the true vine, our source of life. From him we learn to keep alive the music of the Gospel.