

APRIL 29, 2018

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 [ACTS 9:26-31](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32](#)

R. (26a) I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

Reading 2 [1 JN 3:18-24](#)

Gospel [JN 15:1-8](#)

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

HOMILY:

In the words of Jesus that we just heard, he compares himself to a plant (a vine) and us to being like the branches of the plant, like this one, and then he teaches us that, just what keeps the leaves and branches strong and alive is what we need to keep strong and alive.

So . . . what do the leaves and branches of a plant need to remain strong and green? Five main things:

- **Soil**—the soil gives food (nutrients) that the whole plant needs to remain healthy.
- **Sun**—The first of two main ingredients that the plant needs to make food for itself (photosynthesis)—the sun gives the energy needed to make food.
- **Air**—the second of the two main ingredients (specifically part of the air, CO₂, that the plant makes chemical energy to fuel the plant's growth.
- **Water**—the magic substance that dissolves the nutrients from the soil and the fuel from the sun and air and allows it to flow to all the branches and leaves to feed them.
- *All of these are needed, but the final thing is the one that Jesus says is most important, without which all the rest will have no effect.* The final piece that allows the branches and leaves to be fed and grow strong: a **connection!** For, if the leaves and branches are pruned, that is, cut off, from the vine (the plant), they can no longer be fed by the plant's sap, they wither and die.

As with a plant, so too with us in our lives of faith and following Jesus: Just as a plant needs rich soil in which to grow, so we need the rich soil of our faith. Just as a plant needs sunlight to give it energy, so too we need the light of faith. Just as a plant needs air, so we need the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as a plant needs water, so we need the waters of baptism to give birth to faith. Just as the branches need to remain connected to the plant in order to be fed, so we must remain

connected to the Body of Christ in order to be fed. We simply cannot feed ourselves. We don't have what we need.

From the beginning of our faith, followers of Jesus have seen a close connection between Jesus' teaching of the vine and the branches and what we are doing today and each time we gather here: the Eucharist. For Jesus teaches that this is "true food and true drink" (*cf.* John 6:55). Just as the branches can't feed themselves, we need to remain close to Jesus, to be fed by him.

Is one feeding enough? Is First Communion all we need? Just like we need to keep being fed if we are going to grow into the fullness of life, so too, as Jesus suggests in his parable of the vine of branches, we have to remain connected to Him and keep being fed by Him. And how he feeds us most completely, by word and sacrament, is how he said he would do it—in the bread and wine that, under the power of the Spirit, is changed into the incomparable Bread of Life and Wine of our salvation, the Eucharist. To remain strong in faith, you'll need to come many more times, certainly every week!

Can we live without this nourishment? All I say is what Jesus himself says a bit earlier in the gospel of John, when he says, "Unless you eat this bread and drink this cup, you will have no life in you" (John 6:53). In some ways, we can live listlessly and lifelessly—But the question is: why would we want to? I think we decide, instead of letting Jesus feed us, we decide we'll try to feed ourselves—which can work, *for a while*. Why settle for trying to feed ourselves when Jesus has his life to feed us which is the fullness of life? Jesus pleads with us: I am trying to feed you—don't cut yourself off from me! I'm always here to feed the life that I gave you, to make you strong in spirit and full of life.

The joy of our First Communicants has much to teach us. While it's tempting to see a naïveté in them, really, who's being naïve? They see what is true: the joy and life that comes from coming to Jesus, who is the "way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). While our children come for the first time to be fed by this extraordinary grace and gift, let the rest of us come as if it is our First Communion, for we need to remain connected to Him if we expect to live life to its fullest. Enough living for less! Life is waiting for us, right here. No matter how many times we've received this Life—we need Him again.