



Sunday 28th April 2024

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Gospel Reading

John 15.1-8

Other Readings: Acts 8.26-40 Psalm 22.25-31 1 John 4.7-21

Jesus the True Vine

15 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Homily

For the farmers and gardeners among us our Gospel reading is one that we can easily relate to. We know that we have to prune, make compost of or plough back into the soil the growth that is of now worth to what we are trying to achieve at the time. But even that which has no current value can be turned into something useful for the future. We spread ash on the ground, and we plough in the remains of the crop to add back the nutrients or give the soil bulk and air, and entire books have been written extolling the merits of compost!

So, all of these processes can bear fruit in the future which encourages us to believe that God never gives up on us, that we can all try again to become the people he planned us to be. That we can rejoice in being in a loving relationship with him, bearing the fruit that comes from repentance and a growth and strengthening of faith. In an earlier chapter (John 12:24) Jesus talks about the grain that falls to the ground and dies but then goes on to produce an abundance of fruit. Sometimes we do have to be broken down in order to be recreated.

But, we can be reassured by the first letter of John which reminds us that God's love is always available to us, because he has always loved us and loved us so much that He "sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10)

2000 years ago, people were called to repentance, to be part of the community that followed Christ's teachings and to grow in faith, knowledge and understanding, to be part of the vine that is the Kingdom. All God's people, even those who profess to having no faith, can still be part of the vine. Our reading from Acts is a case in point, Phillip nurtures the Eunuch he finds reading the book of Isaiah, baptises him and he goes on his way rejoicing in his newfound knowledge. A new branch grew from the stem that day.

But for those of us who struggle to repent and then grow new shoots of faith, well, we may have to be pruned back, be lost for a while as we reflect on what we might be missing but then, when we are ready, we can be welcomed back in through the roots, growing in faith and learning. Then, growing up through the vine, strengthening and being strengthened, working in relationship with each other, we are welcomed back into that loving and nurturing relationship with our creator through his son.

We are in the season of new growth, so let us proclaim the joy and hope that our faith has given us, nurturing those who seek to be closer to God but believe they have no way back. God never gives up on any of us, he is simply waiting for the chance to draw his precious children in, from wherever they find themselves there will always be a route back.

Conversation Questions

1. Have there been times in your life when you have been aware of new spiritual growth after a time of feeling pruned/cut back?
2. Take some time to reflect on the fact that you are precious to God and that God never gives up on us.
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,

to the glory of God the Father.

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