

April 28 V Sunday of Easter

Today's Scripture selections emphasize the need for Christians to abide in Christ as a condition for producing the Spirit's fruits of kindness, mercy, charity, and holiness.

The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, testifies to the abundance of spiritual fruits yielded by the apostles because of their close bond with the risen Lord. The reading tells us how the Lord pruned the former fanatical Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who had persecuted the Church, to produce a fruit-bearing branch called Paul, the zealous Apostle to the Gentiles, a man now entirely dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel. Even Paul's forced return to Tarsus for a brief period is an example of God's pruning of the vine to bring forth a greater harvest, namely, the mission to the Gentiles.

In today's Responsorial Psalm we sing the end of Ps 22, "... to Him My soul shall live ... let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the Justice He has shown," drawing our strength from Jesus' courage and trust in His Father.

In today's second reading, John, in his first letter to the Church, explains that only if we remain united with Christ by putting our Faith in him and drawing our spiritual strength from him, will we be able to obey God's commandments, especially the commandment of love – a love "not in word or speech but in deed and truth". We are saved because we are members of Christ – of His Church, the community gifted with God's Holy Spirit Whose presence is demonstrated by the members' genuine, active, loving concern for each other.

In the Gospel, taken from the Last Supper discourse, Jesus uses God's Old Testament image of the vine and branches to help his disciples to understand the closeness of their relationship with him and the necessity of their maintaining it. They are not simply rabbi and disciples. Their lives are mutually dependent – as close as a vine and its branches. In fact, in using this image, Jesus is explaining to them and to us what our relationship with him should become.

Jesus claims that he is the true vine: Since Israel has become a degenerate vine producing bitter wild grapes, Jesus makes the unique claim that he is the true and ideal Vine and his disciples are the living and fruit-producing branches. He

clarifies his statement, explaining that his Heavenly Father is the Vine-grower (v. 1), he (Christ) is the Vine (v. 5), his disciples are branches (v. 5) and those who do not abide in him are useless branches, suitable only to be cut away and thrown into the fire (v. 6). Jesus is the true Vine, because the old vine, the original chosen people, was succeeded by the new Vine, the Church, the Mystical Body whose Head is Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). To be fruitful, one must be joined to the new, true Vine, Christ. It is living the life of Christ, the life of grace, which gives the believer the nourishment which enables him or her to yield the fruits of eternal life. This image of the Vine also helps us to understand the unity of the Church. St. Paul explains that we are Christ's Mystical Body in which all the members are intimately united with the Head and united to one another.

1) We need pruning in our Christian life. Cutting out of our lives everything that is contrary to the spirit of Jesus and renewing our commitment to Christian ideals in our lives every day is the first type of self-imposed pruning expected of us. A second means of pruning is practicing self-control over our evil inclinations, sinful addictions and aberrations. Cordial mingling in our neighborhood and society with people of different cultures, races, religions and orientations enables us, with God's grace, to prune away our selfish, judgmental, prejudicial tendencies so that we can treat others in our society with Christian charity and openness. Jesus prunes, purifies and strengthens us by enabling us to face with the courage of our Christian convictions, the pain and sufferings, contradictions and difficulties which He permits to enter our lives.

2) Let us abide in Christ and let Christ abide in us: The four Gospels teach us how to become true disciples of Jesus and how to abide in him as branches abide in the main trunk of the vine and how to draw their life from the vine. Personal and liturgical prayers, frequenting of the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, daily and meditative reading of the Bible, and selfless, loving acts of kindness, mercy and mutual loving forgiveness, all the fruits of God's Grace acting within us, assist us in abiding in Jesus, the true Vine, as fruit-bearing branches.