

## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

*Gospel: John 15:1-8*

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

### **REFLECTION 1: KEEPING IN TOUCH**

Isn't it amazing to recall that the first human being to land on the moon did so in 1969! And what a feat it was in those days before modern technology soared to the dizzy heights it occupies today. And yet only recently I learned that no nation today could afford another moon landing! I remember how the lunar module Eagle carrying astronauts Aldrin and Armstrong, landed on the moon on 20th July 1969. While Armstrong prepared for his moon walk, Aldrin unpacked some bread and wine and put them on the guidance computer. He described what he did next. 'I poured the wine into a cup and in the one-sixth gravity of the moon the wine curled gracefully up the side of the cup. It is interesting to think that the very first food and drink on the moon were the communion elements'. Then just before eating the bread and drinking the wine, Aldrin read this passage from St. John's Gospel: 'I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in that person, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me'. (John 15: 1-8)

Commenting on this communion experience alone on the moon, Aldrin says, 'I sense strongly my unity with the Church back home and the Church everywhere'.

That story not only gives special meaning to today's Gospel, but also underscores the way we, the branches remain united with Jesus, the vine. Vatican 2 reminds us that we remain united to Jesus by three ways in particular; by gathering in his name, by listening to his word and by sharing his Body and Blood. Concerning Jesus' presence among us, Jesus said, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18: 20). Concerning reading and explaining his word in the Scriptures Jesus told his disciples: 'Whoever listens to you listens to me' (Luke 10: 16). Finally concerning eating and drinking his Body and Blood, Jesus told his disciples, 'whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person' (John 6:56).

If we want to find Jesus today we will find him in his Church. Sometimes we hear people say that they can find Jesus and unite with him in their own way and that we don't need the Church. However the only Jesus there is today is the Jesus who rose on Easter Day and this Jesus resides in his Church everywhere.

The old vine of the people of Israel had disappointed God's expectations. Now the new Vine has been planted, a Vine that will bear fruits of life in all those who have been grafted onto it by baptism. This Vine is the glorified humanity of the risen Saviour who gives life through his Spirit to its members. We the people of God are the branches of that Vine through whom the sap, the grace of God, dwells – enlivening our assemblies in his name, breaking by his presence into the words of Scripture and sharing his real presence in the breaking of bread.

## REFLECTION 2:

## THE VINE – THE CHURCH

Australian gardening guru Sabrina Hahn recommends listening to Tchaikovsky when pruning grapevines: "there are two main methods of pruning - cane and spur, and both require of you to remove the majority of growth. So, it's sleeves rolled up and the 1812 Overture in the background!". There is of course the almost surgical science of where and how to cut. That is the real art of pruning that first must be patiently learned and patiently practised.

This comparison of the chosen people with a vine was used in the Old Testament: Psalm 80, for instance, speaks of the uprooting of the vine in Egypt and its re-planting in another land. Then, in Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard, God complains that despite the care and love he has lavished on it, his vineyard has yielded only wild grapes. Jesus previously used this imagery in his parable about the murderous tenants to signify the Jews' rejection of the Son and the calling of the Gentiles (see Matt. Ch. 21). But in our Gospel for today, Jesus explains that he himself is the true vine, because the old vine, the original chosen people, has been succeeded by the new vine, the Church, whose head is Jesus. So, to be fruitful, one must be joined to the new, true vine, Christ. It is no longer a matter of belonging to a community but of living the life of Christ, the life of grace, which is the nourishment which passes life on to the believer and enables her/him to yield the fruits of eternal life. This image of the vine also helps us to understand the unity of the Church, Christ's mystical body, in which all the members are closely united with the head and so are also united with one another.

Jesus describes two situations: that of those who, although they are still joined to the vine externally, yield no fruit. However, those who yield fruit could yield still more - a living faith must yield fruit in the form of deeds - faith working through love. So, one can say that in order to produce fruit pleasing to God, it is not enough to receive Baptism and to profess the faith externally - a person has to share in Jesus' life through grace and has to cooperate with him in his work of redemption. Jesus is making it clear that God is not content with a half-hearted commitment. So, he purifies his own by means of contradictions and difficulties (suffering) which is a form of pruning, to produce more fruit. There is however great hope, if we abide in Jesus, keep close to his word, then 'ask for whatever you will and it shall be done for you!' (John 15:7).