

Year B 5th Sun Easter (2021)

Rooted In Jesus

In comparing himself to a vine in today's gospel reading, our Lord is working with an image which was a very familiar one to the Israelite nation. Over and over again in the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is referred to as the vine or vineyard of the Lord. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and the Psalms all draw this analogy at some point. This comparison had been drawn so often that the vine had become the symbol of the Jewish nation and was even the emblem which was stamped on the coins of the Maccabees.

However, when the symbol of the vine is used in the scriptures, it is invariably linked to the idea of the degeneration of the vine. Isaiah and Jeremiah both berate the people for not obeying the word of God and for falling from the high moral standards which God had set for them. In essence, the vine has grown wild and is in desperate need of pruning or cleansing. The Jews believed that their Jewish heritage would be enough to save them. But Jesus is saying that the only thing that can save them is to be joined to him. Jesus was setting forth the principal that the way to salvation was through faith in him, and not Jewish blood.

Now the vine is a plant that is grown all over Palestine, as it still is today. But it is a plant that requires careful attention if it is to yield the best fruit. First of all, the soil must be prepared and be constantly mulched and fertilized in order for it to flourish. It is like the Israelites, who needed constant reminders from the prophets to follow the commandments or they would stray from them and worship false gods. Then, once growing, it needs constant pruning, because it bears two kinds of branches: one that bears fruit and one that does not. The branches that do not bear fruit have to be removed so that they do not sap the plant's energy.

The useless branches can be compared to the seed that fell on the ground of which our Lord speaks in the parable of the sower. These useless branches fall into three categories: 1) there are the dead branches who are those who refuse to follow Christ's commands; 2) there are the green branches which do not bear any fruit. They are the ones who listen to him and say they follow him, but who do not put their faith into action. And 3) there are those branches which begin to bear fruit but whose fruit withers up and dies during the heat of day or from a lack of moisture. They are the ones who accept him, but who desert him whenever difficulties arise or who find his commands too difficult to follow. Jesus says that, once cut off from him, there is no way for them to attain salvation.

We often say that you can get to know someone by the company they keep. If they stay with a positive crowd, then they will do good. If they hang out with a bad crowd, then they will probably do no good, for they will absorb and mirror the values of the group. So it is with Jesus. If we remain with him, then we will do good, but apart from him, we can do nothing and will certainly perish. The way we remain in him is through prayer. Even Jesus withdrew by himself from time to time to pray to his Father. We must do no less.

Our Lord says in this passage that the fruitful branch does two good things with his life: first of all, he enriches his own life by his contact with Jesus; and 2) he brings glory to the Father. The greatest glory of the Christian's life is to bring glory to God through their life and their conduct. I feel blessed to be able to share the insights that God has given me with you, to be his instrument in touching the hearts of others. But Jesus must be at the center.

Mark Link tells a story entitled "**The Nut That Saved Our Marriage.**" Now you can't read a title like that and not wonder who that nut was. Perhaps it might be a husband who had a sense of humor that defused

situations before they got explosive. Or perhaps it might be one of their children who did something funny to make the couple laugh when situations got tense. Or it might even be a friend who made them see how silly it was to focus on the bad points each had, when they both had so many good points. Well, the answer was none of the above. One day the author was having lunch with her husband and their son, Mike, at their Los Angeles home. Mike was a navy helicopter pilot who was visiting from San Diego. At one point during the lunch, Mike and his father began talking about the helicopter that Mike flew. Mike said: "You know, Dad, as complicated as that helicopter is, its whirling rotor is held in place by a single hexagonal nut." Then turning to his mother, Mike said, "And, Mom, do you know what they call that nut?" His mother shrugged. She had no idea what they called it. "I give up," she said, "What do they call the nut that holds it all together?" Mike smiled and said, "*They call it the 'Jesus' nut.*" (1)

In our gospel reading, Jesus says: "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." If our marriage or our family is in trouble, maybe it's because we have forgotten about the nut that God destined to hold it together. Maybe we have forgotten about Jesus. Maybe we have left Jesus out. Maybe we haven't invited Jesus into our marriage or into our home. Our personal relationships with others in our families and our jobs are very complicated and can easily go wrong. They are like the vine: they need constant care and attention or they will grow wild. These relationships need to be rooted in Christ and the commands he has given us. They need to be rooted in the example of love and forgiveness that he has given us.

It is significant that almost every time that Jesus was invited into a home in Gospel times, he worked a miracle for those who lived there. For example,

-- when the newlyweds invited Jesus into their home, he changed water into wine.

--When Peter invited Jesus into his home, Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law.

--When a Roman centurion invited Jesus into his home, Jesus healed his servant.

-- When Mary and Martha invited Jesus into their home, he raised their brother from the dead.

--When Jairus invited Jesus into his home, Jesus restored his daughter to life.

So if we invited Jesus into our home, wouldn't he do the same for us? The answer to that question is clear. If our marriage, our family, or our personal life is in trouble, maybe it's because we've left Jesus out of it.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Without him, our lives would fall apart. Our lives need to be rooted in him. Like the Israelites, if we are not rooted in him, then our lives will degenerate and stray from the good path because we are weak human beings, subject to temptations. If we are rooted in him, then we will be rooted in love, because God is love. But that's for next week's homily. In the meantime, consider that Jesus could very well be the nut missing from our lives, the one nut that could put us back together.

by Deacon Sil Galvan