

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 29, 2018 Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: ACTS 9:26-31

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord. He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him. And when the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him on his way to Tarsus.

The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

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

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the LORD. The lowly shall eat their fill; they who seek the LORD shall praise him: "May your hearts live forever!"

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him.

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

To him alone shall bow down all who sleep in the earth; before him shall bend all who go down into the dust.

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

And to him my soul shall live; my descendants shall serve him. 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.

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

Scripture Reading: 1 JN 3:18-24

Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.

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."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presens of God..

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a Word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Jesus, the vine, is rooted and stable and will always bring us all the nourishment we need. We are the dependent branches. Maybe you would like to stop there and contemplate such a rich image. Do so if you would like.

Why? Because just beyond it there is the small matter of being pruned. To prune a plant is to cut parts of it off. Jesus mentions it twice in our Gospel reading: Speaking as the vine, he says that the Father takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes, so that it bears more fruit. (Gospel)

Ouch. If we bring forth no fruit, we “will be thrown out like a branch and wither.” If we bear some, we have to be pruned. We lose either way! And it is all our fault. If only I were a better person, if only I had done the right thing, if only the world were different, if only I had been dealt a better hand in the game of life, or, or, or. If I weren't so full of guilt I wouldn't have to be pruned. It is all my fault! But guilt is a major feature of human life. “Everything goes wrong,” it says. To tell the truth, many people take the crucifixion as a direct result of their own sins. “I caused this. My sins killed Jesus.” This is not completely false, but it is out of control. How could your small sins take down the Lord of the universe?

So could there be a better way to deal with guilt? Yes. First, decide whether you are bearing no fruit at all. None. If that is really and actually true, then get help from someone, because spiritually you are dying. Most of us do bear good fruit—it is just that we don't recognize that we do.

Second, with that settled, look at what pruning is. It is a way to make things better, make a better plant, a better tree, a better orchard. If you cut tired old branches from your Philodendron, for instance, it will begin to thrive again, not wither. Pruning encourages new growth and the overall health of the plant or tree.

Third, seen in that way, you and I do need to be trimmed regularly, don't we? Here is an example. Maybe unconsciously we have been thinking that we ourselves are the vine, independent of Christ, not just a branch. The reason pruning would help is not that we should be punished, but that pruning promotes health of the whole person, the whole garden, the whole orchard—the mystical body of Christ.

Can you trust the steadiness of Jesus' gardener hand. Trust even while suffering? Drink in your overflowing share of trust at Sunday's table of the Lord. Let the Word instruct you, let the body and blood of Christ, which was pruned to almost nothing, fill you and shape you. Then you can say to the Lord with the rest of us, go ahead, trim whatever gets in the way! I am not the vine, I am a branch. My job is not to be perfect, it is to remain in you, Christ, and to let you do good within me and through me and us.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What motivated Paul to speak out boldly? Think of examples of people who speak out in order to bring about changes in social justice. Name some ways you can “speak out” using your voice or not.
2. What would your world look like if every day you performed a kind deed for some unsuspecting person? Who would benefit from these acts?
3. You (the branches) remain in Jesus (the vine), whose life runs through you. How does his life running through you relate to your asking God for whatever you want and it being done for you? How could you use this Gospel to explain Paul’s actions in the first reading?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O most loving and gracious Father, Send forth upon us your Spirit of courage, wisdom, and power and may your Spirit guide us in the difficult paths we find hard to walk. We do all this so that we might continue to be sources of life for ourselves and for all we encounter. We ask this through your son, Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen