Easter 5 B 2024

The Gospel today begins with the image of the vine. Jesus said to the disciples, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”* In the Old Testament Israel is often compared to a fertile vine when it is faithful to God. But if it distances itself from Him, it becomes barren, incapable of producing that “wine to cheer the human heart.”

The true vine of God—true life—is Jesus who with His sacrifice of love gives us salvation, opens to us the way to be part of this vine. And as Jesus remains in the love of God the Father, we too, wisely pruned by the word of the Master, if we remain profoundly united in Him, we become fruitful branches that bear an abundant harvest.

Like today’s Gospel, Jesus’ discourses confront and confound us, because they so completely embody our whole human condition. We live all of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The Mystical Body of Christ on earth is, on one hand, *“in agony until the end of time,”* says St Paul. But on the other hand, we are already rising to eternal life and no suffering—not even death—will contravene.

The vine and the branches is a prime example. Jesus envisions the vine on a winter hillside, a stump with waving branches. Suddenly, the branches come to leaf, changing the grey-brown hillside into a chartreuse sea. Where did this life come from?

Then, Jesus sees workers moving among the leaves with sharp knives, pruning off branches with no fruit. He sees lying at His feet the limp branches, almost withered before they hit the ground.

The first truth cannot be more obvious. God, who is the Source of our being, has chosen that all human life thrives in Jesus risen from the dead. For all the names in the world given to people, this is the only one by which we can be saved.

But then there is the business of *“bringing forth fruit.”* Our life in Christ is to show itself in good works. Jesus’ parable suggests this second truth: on the day of our baptism the Church grafts us, as branches, on to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, on to His very Person. From this root we receive the precious life-giving nutrient that enables us to share in the divine life. United and joined to the stock, the branches bring forth fruit not by its own power but in virtue of the stock. We develop in the Lord’s vineyard, bound by His love. *“United by charity unto our Redeemer as members of His body,”* says St Francis de Sales, *“it is that good works, drawing their worth from Him, merit life everlasting.”* If the fruit we are to bear is love, its prerequisite is this “remaining,” “abiding,” which is profoundly connected with the kind of faith that holds on to the Lord and does not let go.

It is indispensable to remain ever united to Jesus because apart from Him we can do nothing. Confronted and confounded, we find ourselves in the breach of human freedom and the inability to do anything with God. If we incline our hearts toward goodness and ask God for help, we receive the necessary strength to carry out our responsibilities. Then human freedom and God’s grace proceed together. Goodness comes from the Lord, and is carried out through us.

True “abiding” in Christ is borne of prayer: Lord Jesus, without You we can do nothing. You are the true Gardener, Creator, Cultivator and Custodian of Your garden, which You plan with Your Word, irrigate with Your Spirit, and cause to grow with Your grace.

Brothers and sisters, each one of us is like a branch that only lives its union with the Lord grows every day in prayer, in participation in the Sacraments and in charity. We who love Jesus, the true Vine, may we produce fruits of faith for an abundant spiritual harvest. Let us pray to the Mother of God that we may remain firmly grafted onto Jesus, and that all our actions may have their beginning and their end in Him.

