

Sunday 2 May 2021 – Easter 5

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True Vine - John 15.1-8

The vine is a plant that requires a lot of care and treatment if you want to get bountiful fruit from it. The vine's shoots are planted in properly prepared and cleaned soil, at a distance of at least four meters from each other. During the first three years, the young grapevine does not bear fruit, but it requires solid care during this time. It should be properly cleaned and trimmed to make it stronger. After three years, the plant should be grafted. Two types of twigs grow from it. Some bear fruit, while others do not. The fruitless ones are cut off so that they do not take away the juices of the beneficial shoots of the plant.

The image of the vine is presented many times in the Bible. The grapevine is a symbol of Israel. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others illustrate with this parable the love of God for his people. Like a good farmer, God cares for the vine, cleans it, and waits for its fruit. Sometimes this process is painful but necessary for the plant to renew itself and bear fruit. Live branches need to be trimmed; dry branches in winter should be cut off and thrown into the fire.

With this well-known image, Jesus presented to us our relationship with Him. Jesus clearly defines that relationship, calling himself the vine and the disciples the branches.

The desire to bear fruit without belonging to the vine is a simple illusion: without me, you can do nothing, Jesus tells us (Jn 15: 5).

This parable is one of Jesus' farewell speeches because it reminds us of his departure. It is not only a Gospel masterpiece - a simple, brilliant illustration of the mystery of God's love for each of us; but also, the testament that Jesus probably left us in the Upper Room during the Last Supper.

Origen, Basil the Great, Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine and many other Church Fathers and Teachers, commenting on this text of the Gospel of St. John, claimed that the Lord Jesus is a true vine because of his humanity. The true vine is Christ as God-Man, God incarnate. We are the branches, and we have the same nature as the vine. It is unbelievable truth - we have God-Man nature.

But it is also a reminder that just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself - unless it remains in the vine - neither do we. If we don't abide in Christ, we won't bear fruit. At St. John, "to abide" is a very powerful word. "To abide" is necessary; it makes our life fertile, dynamic, our life begins to make sense.

In this passage of the Gospel, the word "abide" is repeated eight times (in the entire story about the true vine, with the following three verses - as many as ten

times). The word "abide" (in the original Greek - menó) means: to remain as one; to dwell; to persevere; to continue to be present.

We must remain in Jesus and be faithful to Him if we want Him to remain in us (Jn 15: 4). Otherwise, we will be like wild plants with wild branches; our life will be fruitless, full of disharmony, disorder. It will not be real life, but rather a sterile existence, which will get tired and discouraged sooner or later. And sooner or later, we will then have no place to find the life-giving juices that would set our life in motion, give it flavour and make it bear fruit.

For our life to be beautiful and meaningful, we need to be in a relationship. God created us in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1: 26-27). And since God is a Trinitarian; since God is a bond of Persons, we need to remain in a relationship with Him, and we need to care for this relationship. We have to care for this relationship more than for the others.

In today's world, sometimes we may value all sorts of other belongings too much. We strive for them when they ennoble us or provide support or guarantee certain profits. It could be affiliation to a political party, to a particular social group or other. They are good, useful, and often important. But we must not forget about this most important relationship - the relationship with our God. Admittedly, sometimes this relationship is painful when God is cleansing us and "trimming" us, but always so that our life can be real and meaningful.

We may ask, what exactly does this abiding in Jesus mean?

A fruitful life consists of fulfilling the commandment to love God and others and bear witness and proclaiming the Word of Life. Only this abiding in God gives us the right to ask God for anything and be sure that we will receive it in this life.

But this hope and certainty extend even further beyond our mortal life. As we abide in Jesus, our lives will also bear fruit that grows into eternity.

On the walls of the catacombs, where the bodies of the dead were buried, on the sarcophagi of the first Christians, we can often see vineyards with bunches of grapes as a decorative element. These drawn, sometimes carved vineyards were for our ancestors in faith, a symbol of faith and hope for a reunion with the Risen Jesus. In the heart of Christian graves, these vineyards speak of faith in the future.

It is a bit like when Moses' messengers return with a branch of the vine as evidence of fertile land beyond the desert where the chosen people have wandered for so long.

Christ is just such a proof, He as the vine, the true vine. He is the proof of the existence of another world. A world where we sit down and feast with our Saviour, and he will minister to us.