

April 28, 2024
5th Sunday of Easter
John 15:1-8

Jesus said to the 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.

Background:

The image of God as the master gardener is familiar. Traditionally, Israel would have been represented as the vine through which individuals would maintain their relationship with God.

“Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: Take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briers; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it.” (Isaiah 5:1-7)

In the above text, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the vineyard that God has planted. But the vineyard has refused to bear good fruit. In the Gospel text, John uses Jesus' image of a vine that carries life throughout the plant to teach the Christian community through its relationship with Jesus Christ. Another appealing aspect of this image is that it is difficult to tell where the grapevine's vine ends and the branches begin. Like with grapevines, the different branches spring out from each other and are twisted about each other. The text also emphasizes that the purpose of the plant is to produce a harvest. The nonbearing branches are pruned away from the plant so that new branches will grow that will produce a harvest. The branches cut off from the vine will die.

The vine becomes an image for the new Christian community that is dealing with diversity within itself. That diversity can strain their relationships with each other and the community itself. The new Christians came from Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They were Jews and Greeks. Among the first followers of Jesus were those, like Paul, who at first openly persecuted Jesus and his followers. John uses the image of the vine to speak to this diverse group of people. The risen Christ gives each of them life and binds them together. To be cut off from the other branches is to be cut off from the life source itself.

A system of patronage was widely used at the time of Jesus. Normally people received the goods they needed through a system of trading. If this system failed to meet the needs of people, other sources would have to be developed. People would seek out someone with more influence to be their patron. If the patron accepted, they cared for the other's needs. In exchange, the patron would receive abundant public praise from the person that was being sponsored. The patron received public admiration of the community and was highly valued by people of the day.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of growing plants and especially vine-like plants?
2. Where does your experience of life mirror the interconnectedness of the society and individuals?
3. How has diversity enhanced your life?
4. Are you also aware where diversity threatens your life?
5. What are the fruits that God might be looking to receive from God's shared life with you?
6. What kind of pruning would help you to bear those fruits?
7. Can you take some time to talk with God about your desire to bear fruit, or how you are feeling about pruning some aspect of your life?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for April 28, 2024, the Fifth Sunday of Easter

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.

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!" All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him. To him alone shall bow down all who sleep in the earth; before him shall bend all who go down into the dust. 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.

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.

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."

Excerpts from Acts 9:26-31; Psalm 22:26-28, 30-32; 1 John 3:18-24; and John 15:1-8

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for April 28th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, in the gospel from John, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am the vine, and you are the branches." He adds, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit. 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."

The other readings also have references, not so directly to vines and branches, but to being connected to Jesus and remaining in him, even if there are unlikely circumstances, and to loving in deed and truth, us remaining in him, and him remaining in us. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Saul arrives in Jerusalem after his conversion, to join the disciples, who do not trust him. Barnabas reports how Saul had seen the Lord, and had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus, and after that Saul moves about freely with them. Psalm 22 proclaims, "They who seek the Lord shall praise 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." In the second reading, from his first letter, John writes, "God's commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another. 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."

When Jesus teaches that he is the true vine, he adds some further explanation. "Without me you can do nothing. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you." John in the second reading confirms, "We have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments." Jesus adds, "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!