

5th Sunday of Easter 2009

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Today's gospel is one that I'd rather pray with than preach about. There is something about the imagery of the vine and the branches that invites me into a contemplative place. I like to sit quietly and try to feel the life of Jesus in me, the mystical connection there is between Jesus, the vine, God the Father, the vine dresser and me one of the branches. And except for an occasional "ouch" when I think about something in me that needs to be pruned, some behavior, attitude, fault, sin, it is for me a "feel good", Jesus and me Gospel. So I should probably just stop here go back to the presider's chair and sit quietly seeing images of vine and branches and the fruit of the vine that comes from the source of life and be simply amazed that the very life of Jesus is in me if I remain in Jesus. That is what I should probably do but it would miss the point of the Gospel.

This gospel is more than a feel good, Jesus and me, let me just be gospel. It is about "us". It is about each of us who are the branches of the vine, who are organically connected to Jesus the vine. This is not a gospel of the vine and the branch but the vine and the branches. A single branch can not bear much fruit. It would seem that the Johannine Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples have a strong sense of interdependence. Like the command to wash each other's feet, to be of service to each other, to love as he has loved, the image of the vine and the branches invites us to a consciousness of the other. It is a gospel image that can open us up to the realization that the life of Jesus, the energy, nourishment, that we receive from the source is our common life together. Admittedly it is much easier to think of "Jesus and

me” or my personal relationship with God. Our natural inclination is to think of ourselves first, not necessarily in a selfish way but more because we know that we need to have this life, this energy of Jesus in us, if we are going to bear fruit at all. As he says, “apart from me you can do nothing”. Some might take this as a challenge. “Oh yeah, I’ll show you” Especially if you are a young branch, just budding. Or even if you are an older branch, more brittle who isn’t producing as much as he or she used to when you were young and vibrant, you still might say. “I’ll show you. I can do this on my own”. This gospel is meant to challenge us to realize our interdependence. We need to receive from the life source who is Jesus and we need to know that it is the same life source that nourishes each of us and connects us to each other.

It also can be a wonderful example of the Ignatian Jesuit motto “contemplatives in action”. We need to have the sense of connection with Jesus and the life of the Spirit and with each other if we are going to make a difference, if we are going to serve, if we are going to give of ourselves as Jesus did.

I am conscious of the fact that we celebrate mother’s day, the person whose body and blood was our first life source. I think of well of the mystic, Julian of Norwich who spoke of our “tender mother Jesus”. Why? Because Julian saw the connection between Jesus who gives us his body and blood, who is our spiritual life source and our mothers who gave us physical life through their body and blood. As we have received our lives from our mothers, so we continue to receive the life we need from our “tender mother Jesus” who nourishes us with his body and blood.

I am also conscious of the fact that last week due to some health concerns we did not offer the blood of Christ, the fruit of the vine, to the whole community. And I know that many felt that something very important was missing. Jesus says, take and drink, this is my life blood given for you. This is real fruit of the vine, this wine, consecrated, made holy and blessed that it really becomes my blood which is poured out for you. Given my preaching today, the image of the vine and the fruit of the vine. On this mother's day when our tender mother Jesus shares his life with us, who are we to refrain from receiving the gift. Of course there still may be some who for personal or health reasons choose to simply acknowledge the gift of the blood of Christ, the fruit of the vine with a reverential bow but I hope that the brief interruption of the custom of receiving the blood of Christ has made us even more aware of the awesome gift of his life for us.

Well for someone who said at the beginning that he should just be quiet, I know that I have gone on at great length but I hope that you will take with you today, this mother's day, how Jesus offers his life to us to be our life source and how we are all connected to each other through the one who is our Life.