

Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter 2021 Year B

To anyone who does not understand the principles of gardening, pruning looks like a process that is terribly wasteful. That severe cutting back of what may be beautiful flowers or rich foliage seems to be all wrong.

But to anyone who does understand those principles, then they know that it is only through that painful cutting away that new, stronger and richer growth comes through. It is a miracle of nature.

The people of Christ's time were a lot closer to nature than most of us are today, so in today's Gospel we find Christ using the very clever device of the growth of the Vine to teach His followers some important lessons.

Lesson 1.

He is the Vine, and we are the branches.

Without the nourishment, moisture and support offered by the strong central Vine, the branches wither and die. Our lives and our eventual Salvation are rooted in Christ. That is a very basic lesson that we need to learn over and over again, because we live in an age and a dominant philosophy in which self-reliance, independence, and self-assertion are pushed and promoted. We are encouraged to shape and manufacture ourselves. We are what we take the trouble to make of ourselves.

There is, of course, a lot of truth in that, that we can shape and direct our lives.

But the image of Christ, the Vine, reminds us that there is an important dimension to human life and existence that is out of our reach and independent of us.

We are loved, sustained, sanctified, and redeemed through the person of Christ. "Cut off from me, you can do nothing by yourselves - you wither".

As the branch and its leaves wither when detached from the vine, so also, unless there is a personal relationship with Christ, our spiritual life and all that depends upon it have no lasting foundation.

Lesson 2.

The image of the Vine teaches us that just as the Vine sustains the branch, so that it might bear fruit, so too Christ sustains and nourishes us, that we might

be fruitful and grow, to produce fruit that will last. And, just as some of the most wonderful fruit comes after careful pruning, so too the same analogy works in our lives.

How are we pruned?

Christ teaches us that we are pruned already by means of the word he has spoken to us.

Just think about it for a moment, there are times in our lives that we accumulate a lot of deadwood, the deadwood of bad habits, sinful relationships, lack of discipline, and wrong ways of thinking. None of these situations ultimately does us any good whatsoever, the fruit does not last.

If we can have the habit in our lives of reading or listening attentively to the Word of God in the teachings of Christ, start thinking about it and letting it sink in and take root, then it does have the power to prune. We are forced to perhaps look at some of the deadwood in our lives and perhaps painfully, and with great sacrifice, allow it to be cut away. But the principle always remains true that whatever is properly pruned always results in stronger, healthier, and more fruitful growth.

It is a very clever analogy, Christ's use of the Vine and the branches, because we all need to be pruned from time to time for healthy spiritual growth. If we resist it or deny it, we will wither and die.

The natural branch does not have that power, it is passive, it must submit to the pruner's knife, and only then does it flourish.

We can deny, resist, and run away from the pruning action of the Word of God in our lives because the change required might be too inconvenient, too great a sacrifice, so we just do not want to know. As we are free to resist the action of the love and the Grace of God in our lives, so too we must freely endure its consequences, spiritual weakness, stunted growth, and even spiritual death.

In those terrible words of Christ, "We wither and die and are cast on the fire".

So, respect the Word of God, it is a powerful thing.

As Saint Paul says, "Alive and active it cuts to the innermost part of the soul".

If we take it in, it judges us, and we are to be judged against it. It prunes us, requires us to cut back the deadwood, but the growth that results is the fruit that is life eternal.