

Readings Acts 9: 26-31; 1 John 18-24; John 15: 1-8



Fr Michael says:

The Vine and the Branches

At the heart of what Jesus gave His whole life to, was His desire to build Community, it is the whole purpose of His journeying with His disciples over the three years of His Ministry: Paul was prepared to undergo all sorts of hostility to show his faith in Jesus, to ensure his work would build up the assemblies that he formed in so many places. John reminds us of how important it is to believe in Jesus and to show how it is based on love by gathering around him others of similar mind. He says six times “remain”. The Parable of the Vine and Branches, affirms this truth – the one cannot exist without the other.

Why did He chose the Vine as his example, because it is unique – the vine draws its nourishment through the centre of the tree and not through the bark as do other trees and bushes – to be cut off means to die! Vividly are we made aware of the intensity and closeness between the vine and its branches! Yet the vine needs the branches to produce the fruit – so we are needed: ALL of us! Together we are one, we may feel inadequate, but we are attached to the vine which is sturdy and full of life. So we are led to fulfil our community life through action seen in the Ascension: Jesus empowering us to take His place and be Him to those around us – the fulfilment is Pentecost and the launching of evangelisation, in which we all share.

We are needed to produce the fruit: there is a difference between successfulness and fruitfulness. Success comes from strength, control and respectability, which can produce fame and rewards; Fruitfulness often comes from weakness and vulnerability and is often unrecognised and unrewarded. Jesus asks us to be fruitful, not successful. Each of us has gifts which we share with others as we develop them and so become fruitful. God makes our love fruitful, whether we see it or not.

Vines need pruning to allow, by Jesus’ Father, the fruit to be richer for the future, it is a painful process, but ultimately it works to increase the yield and quality of it. We need to be pruned in our lives too – we have much that is useless and even harmful for us in the work of producing fruitfulness. The trials and difficulties and the ups and downs that we experience are essential parts of this process – through it we become more understanding and fruitful in compassion.

“We too easily tend to focus our eyes on our sinfulness and nothingness and then we forget that we have risen with Christ, that we have a wonderful life to live in His Holy Spirit, that we have been overwhelmed with His gifts, the best way to appreciate them is to look at them and look at God’s love...we must see that it is really a life and not just a living death.” Thomas Merton