

Homily 5th Sunday Easter Year B - I am the vine 2024

Jesus boldly proclaims, "*I am the true vine,*" and in calling us the branches goes on to include us all. Jesus makes it very clear that we are fully integrated into him and he in us. It is together that we form a unity fed by God's graces. In emphasising that he is the vine and that we are the branches, Jesus highlights the profound intimacy he seeks to share with each of us. Jesus suggests that like the sap in a vine gives life to everything attached to it, his life flowing through everything fills us all with his risen life!

The gospel also proclaims our ultimate dependence on God as well as our dependence upon each other because one of the primary ways that God is present to us is precisely through each other. The first Christians had a very strong sense of their dependence on one another if they were to become all that God was calling them to be.

St. Paul's vision of the Church as the body of Christ speaks of a community of believers who are mutually interdependent. As Paul says, *'the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"'*. Paul himself, the great missionary, was aware of his dependence on others in the Church. Therefore, Jesus' image of the vine in the gospel, like Paul's image of the body, suggests how we as believers are dependent on each other and, ultimately, on the Lord, if we are to live as the Lord's disciples. Jesus states, *'a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself'*. We cannot live fruitful lives as Christians by going it alone. We need a community of believers if we are to become all that our baptism calls us to be. We need to be connected in some way with a community of faith, the members of our parish, whom we can call Church. It is only in communion with other believers that our lives can bear the fruit of the Spirit. It is in and through other believers that the Lord can nurture our faith so that it shapes our lives more and more. That community of believers as we well know will often be a very mixed bag of people.

In another image that Jesus uses, he describes it to be a mixture of wheat and weeds, as indeed each one of us is. Yet, it is there that we find the Lord in a privileged way and it is through this connection that we have with the Church that we are connected to him. This connection with the Lord is vital because, if we are to live our baptism to the full, it is on him that we are ultimately dependent. We need the Lord if our lives are to bear the fruit of the Spirit. As Jesus states in the gospel reading, *'cut off from me you can do nothing'*. If we are dependent on the Lord, there is a sense in which he wants us to share fully in his mission.

In the gospel Jesus says, *'Whoever remains in me... bears fruit in plenty'*. We would all consider fruit to be healthy food; it is an important source of nourishment. Lives that bear fruit in plenty are lives that nurture others, lives that are life-giving for others. The Lord depends on us to feed each other with his love and his presence. He wants to use us to give concrete expression to his love for others. We can only do this if we are connected to the vine and are in union with the Lord and his disciples, like branches on a vine.

A grape went to an art gallery and stood next to a painting of a vineyard. A visitor remarked, *"This grape looks so real!"* The grape blushed and whispered, *"That's because I'm in my 'element.' I always wanted to be a 'still life' model!"*

In a bunch of grapes, one grape was always curious. It became known as the **'Grape Detective.'** One day, a raisin asked for help, saying, *"I've lost my identity!"* The Grape Detective laughed and said, *"Don't worry, you're not lost. You're just a sunburned grape!"*

In the heart of the vineyard, there was a grape known for its sense of humour. One day, it revealed its secret talent. *"I'm not just a grape,"* it declared, *"I'm also a 'grape' ventriloquist!"* *"How so?"* asked a curious berry. The grape replied, *"I can make people 'wine' without moving my lips!"*