

5th Sunday of Easter (B)

29th April 2018

'Vine and Eucharist'

Acts 9: Saul preaches fearlessly 1Jn 3: Our love is to be something real and active.
Jn 15:1-8: *I am the vine, you are the branches ...*

The images that St John gives us throughout his unique Gospel are many and varied. Time and time again Our Blessed Lord uses that phrase, in John's Gospel, "I Am." It echoes the sacred name of God revealed to Moses hundreds of years before, "YHWH," "I Am who Am." But attached to that "I Am" are often descriptions that elaborate on who Jesus is. "I Am the Light of the World," "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life," "I Am the Bread of Life," "I Am the Gate of the Sheepfold." Last week we had part of Jn10 on Jesus's self-description, "I Am the Good Shepherd," and this Sunday we hear another: "I Am the True Vine." What is important to notice is that all these images relate not just to Jesus in Himself, closed in on Himself, but show how He relates to us, His Holy People.

This Sunday's image in particular speaks of His intimate union with us: the Vine is one, stem and branches in one living being, just as Christ incorporates us into one being with Him through Baptism. We become, as the

Church, "one body, one spirit, in Christ." We are not Our Lord's people as underlings or subjects; He treats us instead as family, as intimates. He unites Himself with us, such that we live by His very life, as He makes abundantly clear with His words: "I Am the Vine, you are the branches ... Whoever remains in Me, with Me in him bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from Me you can do nothing." This is a communion of life and love that no-one could have imagined before Christ Himself appeared. No-one in Old Testament times could have dared suppose that such a union of God with humanity would come about, or even be in the mind of God. And yet this was precisely the plan that the Almighty Father wished to effect: to unite mankind so closely to Himself, such that we become one with Him, live one life, with one grace, His gift of the Spirit.

For me, this image of the whole Christ, as Vine and branches — Christ Jesus the Head or Stem, and we the body of the Vine — is made all the more rich when one folds into this idea the Holy Eucharist. If we live as the branches of the Vine, by Jesus's own life, then we do so by

the sap, the 'life-blood' of that holy Vine, which is the sacred food of Jesus. To be one with Jesus, and living His life, means to be nourished perpetually by the Precious Blood of the Body of Christ. We live in Jesus by feeding on His own holy, divine, life given us in Holy Communion. So much of the Easter message points towards the union of Jesus's people with His risen body in the Eucharist. Several of the Easter Gospel accounts of His appearances make reference implicitly to His feeding the disciples. And as we continue into Eastertide we are reminded that our perfect union with His Resurrection life is in His feeding us with His Body and Blood. I would like, therefore, to point you towards several things that can re-ignite our love for Jesus's life-giving presence in the Holy Eucharist.

The 1st is that the Church in this country is having a Eucharistic Congress in early September in Liverpool. It may be that only a few of us can attend, but we can all keep it in our prayers. The last one was in 1908, so it's a significant moment for us as Catholics in England & Wales. I've invited 4 of our younger parishioners to attend with me,

but now I can open up applications to others, so if you have any desire to come, then simply take an application form from alongside the Newsletters. The 2nd thing is that the stunning church of Corpus Christi, Covent Garden, is having a solemn re-opening and dedication by Cardinal Vincent on the feast of Corpus Christi this year, 3rd June. Based at this church is also a 'Sodality of the Blessed Sacrament' which is a guild of prayer in honour of Jesus's Sacred Body & Blood, and I have joined this, and maybe some of you would, too. And the 3rd thing is that, in preparation for the Congress, but before the summer break, I want to give a series of talks on the background to the Holy Eucharist, on one Tuesday evening in each of May, June and July. Do please note the dates (newsletter/flyer) and think of coming to increase your knowledge and love of Jesus's most blessed gift. "Cut off from Me, you can do nothing," He says. Let's allow that precious life-blood of His to course through our veins, so we become more and more the sort of holy people He would want us to be: His branches, living His life in the world.