

5th SUNDAY OF EASTER; Cycle – B; April 28th 2024
Acts 9:26-31; 1 John 3:18-24; John 15:1-8

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

The beauty and the richness of the synoptic gospels are found in the many parables Jesus told in them. Using simple life examples, Jesus explained to his disciples the mystery of the Kingdom of God and taught great moral lessons. On the other hand, John does not mention any of those parables in his gospel. In John Jesus conveys his messages and teachings through long discourses and arguments. At the same time, the two allegories or imageries John uses are very unique to him. For instance, last Sunday, we heard in John the beautiful imagery of the ‘*Good Shepherd*’ and we have just listened to the second and last imagery of John which is the ‘**Vine and Branches.**’ Both these were taken from the ordinary life situations of the people in Palestine.

Last Sunday, through the simple imagery of sheep and shepherd, he showed his disciples as how deep is his relationship with them. **This Sunday through the imagery of vine and branches Jesus explains to his disciples how crucial it is for them to remain with him, if they want to achieve anything in their life.** The vine was deeply rooted not only in the material life of Israel but also in their spiritual life. Of course, vineyard was common in Palestine and wine was the only drink used in the celebrations. But in the spiritual realm, the people of Israel were known as *the vine branch God brought from Egypt and planted in the Promised Land.* The Psalms and the Prophets give us ample references to this great fact. But the imagery of the vine in the Old Testament is not something positive. For, Israel, the vine of God, didn’t produce any good grapes; rather wild ones. In other words Israel never came up to the expectation of God at all; rather they broke away from Him. *So the vine depicted in the Old Testament is the symbol of degeneration.*

Jesus too was aware of this negative picture of vine remaining in the hearts of people. That is why in today’s gospel Jesus begins the imagery with the saying, **“I am the true vine.” It means, Jesus is the genuine vine.** From this short phrase it is very clear that Israel was not the true vine but Jesus is the true vine. Compared to other parables in the synoptic gospels, this small imagery is contained only in 8 verses. But one thing we should notice that in these 8 verses Jesus uses the phrases, **“remain in me and as I remain in you” 8 times.**

Those of you who grow fruit trees know how to take care of them. After the winter the branches that bear fruits are pruned, so that they may bear more fruits. None of you maintains a vineyard. For the better yielding of grapes the vine should be thoroughly

pruned. The good branches are pruned and the dead ones are removed, so that there may be good yielding. In the same way, as Jesus says, in order to become his true disciples we should be pruned by him; in other words we should be ready to part with the unwanted pleasures and habits of life. It shows that to become a disciple of Jesus one should be ready to bear suffering and pain. Jesus never promises us an easy life in this world. He says to his followers, **“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mt. 16:24)**. The emphatic and repeated use of the phrase *‘remain in me’* and the radical statement of Jesus, **“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing,”** show how important it is for us to remain with Jesus to achieve anything in the world. We need to give careful attention to these words of Jesus, ***‘without me you can do nothing.’***

Though 65% of American population claims to be Christians, perhaps only less than 25% practice their faith. Due to the over domination of science and technology and secularism most of the Christians don’t believe that Jesus has anything to do with their lives. As every help is available with a button press away, they don’t feel the need of a God to interfere with their lives. Medical science and technology are very essential in our lives. They are God given gifts and we have to make use of them. At the same time, we are well aware of their limitations too. Remember, when they work in the hands of Jesus, things will change; the impossible becomes possible.

As believers, Jesus should not be the last resort we look for help. Before we seek the help of science and technology we need to trust in the power of Jesus. In the Book Psalms the Psalmist says, **“Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch.” (Ps 127:1)**. Let us labor but only with Jesus. Let us always remember the words of Jesus, *‘without me you can do nothing.* Jesus continues in today’s passage, **“Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither.”** The similar saying we find in Matthew 12:30, **“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”** If we don’t want to wither like a dead branch and be scattered, we need to remain in Jesus and Jesus in us. In the Book of Sirach the author says: *“Rely not on your wealth; say not: “I have the power.” Rely not on your strength in following the desires of your heart. Say not who can prevail against me? For the Lord will exact the punishment.” (Sir 5:1-2).*