

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

St. John 15:1-8

The thing you probably heard most from the Gospel was the “vine.” That is, how Our Lord is the vine and we are the branches. In fact, the most important thing of this Gospel is not the image of the vine but the verb, “to remain”. This Gospel forms part of the centre-piece of Our Lord’s farewell discourse to His apostles and disciples. The first part, which we just heard, is about remaining in Christ. The second part is about His commandment to love. The third part is warning that those who are Christian will be hated by the world. This means that we cannot love unless we remain in Christ, but if we remain in Christ and we love as He taught us, then the world will turn against us.

By virtue of our baptism we are like a branch grafted onto the vine that is Christ. In other words we are fused with the rootstock that is Christ. There are a number of reasons for grafting: maybe to propagate the plant, maybe to make the planter hardier or stronger or sturdier, to provide pollen or the seed of the plant, to repair damage caused to the plant, or even to maintain consistency. When we are grafted by baptism we are fused to Christ and draw our nutrients through the rootstock that is Christ, and by baptism the Church grows. By our education in the Faith, by our prayers, fasting, alms-giving, the Church is made hardier and stronger and sturdier, and our evangelisation and good works are the pollen or the seed that make the Church spread and to be founded in desolate places. By the Sacrament of Penance the damage caused by us and to us is repaired by the grace and the mercy of God. By our knowledge of and fidelity to the Scriptures and Tradition the Church is made constant.

Without remaining in Christ, without our foundation in the Church, we cannot draw on the nutrients of the rootstock. Instead, we effectively go it alone

to battle the elements and disease.

Of course and unfortunately, remaining in Christ and being faithful to the Church does not guarantee that we are not ravaged by the elements and disease. But as painful as it is, Christ did not say that we should remain in Him to avoid pain and suffering and injustice. In fact He said that if we are to remain in Him then we will, without doubt, experience these things. That is because of the choices that we make and the choices made by others to which we are subjected.

Our responsibility is not to wait for the coming of the kingdom of God but to continue to inaugurate that kingdom. This means we must be just even though we suffer injustice, we must love even though we suffer hatred, we must be generous even though we suffer selfishness, and we must give life even though we suffer death. It is difficult and it is painful and, for the most part, it goes against the grain. We want justice, and if we don't get it, we want revenge. We want love, and if we don't get it, we want others to know just how much they have hurt us. We want generosity, and if we don't get it, we feel we might as well be selfish. This is natural, but it is only natural to our fallen nature. That is why we are called to be grafted to the rootstock that is Christ. Because Christ, that rootstock, justice personified who suffered the greatest injustice, love embodied who suffered the greatest hatred, generosity made man who suffered the greatest selfishness, who weathered it all, was struck down, but whose roots remained so firmly embedded in the Father that not even death could overcome the life that lay within Him. That is why we graft ourselves onto Christ. That is why we remain in Christ, so that the strength and courage and perseverance and life that He bears within Himself—that He is Himself—is transplanted into us. So that we are just in the face of injustice, love in the face of hatred, and generosity in the face of selfishness, and so that we can weather it all, because of Our Lord and so come to share in the eternal life that lies within Him.