
WORD MADE FLESH

Fifth Sunday of Easter **The Fermentation of the Spirit***

Acts 9:26-31, 1 John 3:18-24, John 15:1-8

The texts we are invited to contemplate, as the implications of the passions, death and resurrection of Christ take root in us, are about growth and maturation. This season of the church year calls us to consider how we are made for the sanctified life, a fruitful life. We are called to consider holiness.

Jesus Christ, in today's Gospel, is speaking to his disciples about wine-making. He speaks of himself as the vine and of his Father, the winegrower and vintner. He speaks of his disciples as branches drawing the source of their life from the vine.

Jesus speaks of God as the one who understands the vine, the seasons of growth and decline, the fallow seasons, and the diseases and weather that can nip the fruit of our life in the bud. His Father (our Father) is the master of fermentation. God nurtures the blossoms and the setting of fruit. God tends the grapes with care and diligence responding to the climate and demands of each day so the fruit may come to perfection in the finest vintage the season of harvest can offer.

And each season bears fruit intended to makes our hearts glad and deepening our gratitude at the wonder of life.

This is not an easy Gospel. The text tells us to consider the vine grower's work in our life. Consider your experience: its seasons of growth and decline, its fallow seasons, the diseases and weather that threaten to nip it in the bud, to rob it of its proper fruit. The vine grower "removes every branch in me," Jesus says, "that bears no fruit." "Every branch in me that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."

We grow through the encounters of life and the thoughts and deeds that animate our being, in what we do and what we fail to do. Our thoughts and actions incline us in one direction or another. What we think is life-giving may turn to disaster. What we try to avoid for its pain and sorrow may later prove hardy, a source of what is best in us, the vintage of our experience and that which makes the heart of the world glad. But, of course, we do not know, in the heat or drought of a season, which is which, and so the branches that are cut off hurt beyond our ability to bear it and the pruning may seem like death itself.

Jesus tells his disciples (and you and me) that this is not extraordinary, that this is the way our life is and the way the vine grower works with us so that our lives may bear fruit in due season. He simply says that we need not fear the cutting away of dead branches or the pruning of our life and calls us to steadfastly abide in him.

But how to abide in him? It is easy to forget the lessons of Great Lent, of Gethsemane, the trial, the road to Golgotha. It is so hard to remember the crucifixion with its moments of recognition, forsakenness and the

final offering of one's whole being (even in death) to the Lover of Life.

Abiding in Christ is to claim our fragile sense of incarnation and not deny the realities that are before us. It is to walk the road that leads from Bethlehem to Calvary being stripped of all that is death within us. Only then, the Gospel tells us, can we "bear much fruit" and yield the vintage of our life in its season.

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