

HOMILY ~ FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER APRIL 27/28, 2024

I hope you are noticing all of the new life that is sprouting up all over this spring. The trees are blooming and getting leaves. Lots of bulbs are sprouting and blooming. All that new life gives me hope for the future. Spring is also a time that we are doing spring clean up in our yards with all of the dead branches, leaves and plants that did not make it over the winter. Much of the new life from last year has become the trash that we are gathering and discarding because they became separated from their source of life and died.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel Reading today, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”* If we are going to live and do well, we have to stay connected to Jesus. So how do we stay connected to Jesus? I think communal prayer is very important. Gathering together each week for Mass and receiving the Eucharist is essential. Our lives sometimes become so busy that a week can go by without our thinking about Jesus. Coming together in community each week connects us with Jesus for at least one hour. Receiving the Eucharist strengthens us spiritually for what we will face during the week. I think it is important to connect with our St. Edith Family. Stay for hospitality or join one of the groups or ministries. Get to know people. We need to support one another. When my faith is weak, I am strengthened by this community.

It is also important to spend some time in personal prayer each day. If we are going to stay connected with Jesus, we need to spend time with him alone. Think about your relationships. Aren't you much closer to the people you spend some one-on-one time with compared to the people you only see in a group? Start small and work up. Set aside time each day. We need to stay connected to Jesus even when he is taking us to a place where we think we do not want to go. Maybe he knows better. Maybe this is the way we are being pruned to bear more fruit.

If we stay connected to Jesus, what is the fruit that we bear? The fruit is love. We receive love from Jesus, and we can share it with everyone we meet. Mother Theresa was asked, *“How do you measure the success of your work?”* She responded, *“I don’t remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He only spoke of faithfulness in love. This is the only success that counts.”* All of the activities that we do every day have something missing if they are done without love. Jesus tells us to love, but he takes it a step further. He tells us, *“Love your enemies.”* Loving those who love us is easy; but loving our enemies, that is hard.

Sometimes we like having a group we can call our enemies. For example, if you decide people who belong to a different political party are the enemy, then you can scapegoat that group and say they are the cause of all of our problems. That relieves us from all responsibility. How many people love someone who has a different political opinion from you? Just about everyone. So the people with a different political opinion that you know and love are not your enemy, but people that you do not know and love are? Does that make sense? The truth is that it is not US and THEM, it is just US. We have to solve the problems together. The only way you will change someone’s opinion is with love. You cannot insult someone into agreement.

When Jesus tells us to love, he does not mean being civil to one another or tolerate one another. If someone told me, *“My spouse and I are civil to one another,”* I would think you probably need some counseling. If I told you, *“I tolerate my Parish Family,”* you would probably think I should not be the pastor. You may ask, *“How can I love someone who is unlovable?”* Everyone is lovable. People may say or do something that is unlovable, but that does not make them an unlovable person. That is what the Gospel of Life is all about. It is about the dignity of each human person from the moment of conception to the time of natural death. Everyone is good and deserving of our love. So stay connected to Jesus and bear good fruit. It is all about the love.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim