

Homily - Easter 5 - April 29, 2018

When was the last time that you got pruned? Have you ever been pruned? I remember as a child hearing this gospel story and wondering about vines and prunes. I had never heard the verb prune before, and envisioned prunes as just dried up fruit as in the old commercial: "Have you had your prunes today?" or as in the expression "Don't have such a prune face!" or "Don't be an old prune!" None of these expressions sound very complimentary.

Jesus doesn't mince any words. He clearly states his understanding of pruning. If we want enjoy life, we need to be connected to him and bear fruit. Those are two big demands. Just like a branch cannot survive if it is not attached to the rest of the tree, so, we cannot survive unless we are attached to him.

Pruning makes the tree bear even more fruit. So, being attached to Jesus is important, and, if we are not bearing fruit, then, in his words: "Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither." I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty serious to me. Again, there are two very important aspects, remaining attached to Jesus and bearing fruit.

Think back on your own lives. Were there ever times when you were not bearing much fruit? Were there times when the fruit was non existent? Here's the point. At those moments of your life when you were not a vibrant part of the tree, in other words, a vibrant part of Christ, was your life better? I would be willing to bet that the answer is "no," that you were not better without Christ, without being attached to the tree.

Put another way, is your life better with or without Christ? You see we were made to be part of God's life. When Christ came into the world, he made that even more clear especially with the image of him being the vine and us being the branches.

There are three very important ways to remain united with Jesus: when we gather in his name, when he listen to and obey his word, and when we share his body and blood. It sounds so very simple, and it is, but so many have forgotten this fact and have chosen to try to live lives apart from the true vine.

Where do we find Jesus? Clearly, the answer is in his Church. We hear some say that they do not need a church to find Jesus. Well, I think it's Jesus who decides where he can be found, not us. Jesus established

the Church to be his living presence among men. The Jesus who rose from the dead lives in his church. Paul said it this way in his letter to the Colossians: “Jesus is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body’s life.”

However, and here’s the hook, if others are to find Jesus in the Church, it has to be through us who are the Church. The Church is not a body of bricks or stone. Rather, the Church is the body of Christ, his people.

When we gather, as we now gather in his name, we are Church. As Church, we celebrate God’s word. In this context, we share his body and blood. What an awesome privilege we have! What an awesome responsibility, to be the body of Christ.

Lord, you are the vine, and we are your branches.
As the branches draw life from the vine, so we draw life from you.

Lord, help us remain united to you always, by gathering in your name,
by hearing your word,
and by sharing your Body and Blood.

For in this way
we make you visible to our world.

Lord, help us remember always
that where your Church is, there you are