

Missionary Commentary

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 28, 2024

Sunday Readings

Acts 9:26-31
Psalm 22:26-28, 30-32
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

[USCCB link to the Readings](#)

Bearing Abundant Fruit

Our Gospel today is well known; it is often called Jesus' "Vine and Branches Discourse." Jesus explicitly says that he is the true vine and that we are the branches; we must remain in him in order to bear much fruit.

Background. Many of Jesus' teachings provided concrete and practical meaning for his listeners, because they are drawn from familiar agricultural imagery. Jesus used graphic analogies to communicate his kingdom message, making it clear and intelligible. For example, fully one-third of Jesus' recorded teaching in the Gospels is found in his parables, numbering about fifty. Jesus, the master-teacher, constantly used vivid language to transmit his message effectively.

These narratives engage our imagination and are easily remembered; the characters emerge vividly; the symbolism is rich in meaning. Jesus used common items familiar to his audience (e.g. sheep, salt, light, bread, weeds, birds, flowers, wheat, etc.). They make the spiritual lesson or truth *concrete* and linked into *daily life*. Listeners are drawn into the story, hear Jesus' unique "twist" or interpretation, and are challenged to discover for themselves the truth of Jesus' teaching—and then to integrate it into their personal lives.

Vine Imagery. Did you ever observe how small and fragile is the vine of the cucumber, squash or pumpkin plant? Yet, life-giving nutrients and liquids are flowing through it. However, if the vine is injured or broken, it will not blossom and no fruit will be produced. Also, the vine needs pruning so as to increase its yield.

The vine must be cultivated, fertilized, watered and nurtured. This happens as we listen to Jesus' words spoken through sacred scripture. In addition, nourishment comes through the ministry and celebration of the Word and Sacrament and in Church teaching and pastoral practice.

The sacrament of the Eucharist requires bread and wine. Wine is "the fruit of the vine" and is transformed into the eucharistic cup. Other forms of nourishment and strength for the branches (you and I) come through prayer and service of neighbor as well as surrender to God's will in our lives.

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Personal Experience. As a boy I grew up on a farm; I witnessed the great care and effort that my father took to assure a good harvest. He prepared and fertilized the soil, planted the seed carefully, cultivated and weeded the crop, nurtured it as it grew, prayed earnestly for proper rain and to be spared from any destructive storm.

When harvest time arrived, my “papa” brought in the crop with great joy and gratitude in his heart. Dad, though he only was able to finish elementary school, was a good, upright, hard-working farmer! From him I learned numerous lessons and qualities on how to be an effective, pastoral priest and missionary.

For our farming family **LIFE ITSELF** depended on a fruitful harvest. Is the challenge any different for us as Christians? Jesus asks us to glorify his heavenly Father by bearing much fruit and becoming his disciples.

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

This narrative recounts the story of the recently converted Paul and how he was now preaching the good news of Jesus; it includes a short summary on the peace and progress of the early Church.

Responsorial Psalm

All nations and peoples who hear the good news are called to praise the Lord—even those who are yet to be born.

Second Reading

Here John, who probably wrote this letter in his old age, gives us sincere personal advice on keeping the commandments.

Gospel

This passage is from Christ’s “farewell message” at the Last Supper; it vividly describes how we are to be luxurious vines producing abundant fruit.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James Kroeger, who recently published
[A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis: Exploring Twelve Pivotal Documents](#)
(Faith Alive Books — 2024)

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