

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of the Easter Season

Generally speaking, we Catholics are familiar with the broad brushstrokes of Jesus' story and we know many of his sermons and his miracles, but we are hard pushed to arrange these sermons and miracles in the order in which they occurred. So, it is important to look at the reference printed at the head of the gospel passage. Today's gospel comes from John chapter 15 which tells us that these words of Jesus were spoken in that short interval between the end of the Last Supper and the arrest of Jesus. Knowing this deepens our appreciation of the significance of what Jesus is saying. For instance, the words *"Every branch that bears no fruit he cuts away"* and *"anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers"* take on new depth when we think of the treachery of Judas Iscariot who left the Last Supper to betray Jesus.

On the eve of his death, when he will be taken away from them, Jesus speaks to his disciples about how they will and must remain connected: His death is not going to bring their relationship to an end nor put a stop to their work of preaching *"repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*¹ However, their relationship will no longer be that of a rabbi and his disciples wandering around Galilee and Judaea, but he will be *"the vine"* and they *"the branches"* in the vineyard of the world where the *"Father is the vinedresser."* Maintaining their relationship is important if they are to *"bear fruit in plenty."* They must *"remain in me"* says Jesus *"for cut off from me"* they will be able to do nothing; *"a branch cannot bear fruit by itself."*

As Jesus awaits his arrest and death, not only does he address how he will remain connected with his disciples, but he also speaks on the changing nature of their discipleship. They have now served their apprenticeship. They began to bear fruit when they first responded to his call and during their time together the Father has pruned *"every branch that does bear fruit to make it bear even more."* *"You are pruned already"* Jesus tells them *"by means of the words I have spoken to you."* Now, with their apprenticeship served, it is time for them to go *"to bear fruit in plenty"* and then, and only then, will they prove themselves to be true disciples worthy of the confidence which Jesus has placed in them. As he states clearly in the final sentence of today's gospel, *"It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and then you will be my disciples."*

With the knowledge that these words of Jesus were spoken between the Last Supper and his arrest we are able to see this discourse of the vine and the branches as a statement of trust in the eleven disciples who have made remained faithful to him and as a commissioning of their ministry. By extension it is a reminder to us that we must follow in their footsteps.

¹ Lk 24: 47