

Sunday 2nd May 2021

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Collect

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

First reading

Acts 8:26-40

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,

and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Psalm 22:24-30

24 My praise is of him in the great assembly;
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the Lord shall praise him:

"May your heart live for ever!"

26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

27 For kingship belongs to the Lord;
he rules over the nations

28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust fall before him.

29 My soul shall live for him;

my descendants shall serve him;
they shall be known as the Lord's for ever.

30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn
the saving deeds that he has done.

Second reading

1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Gospel reading

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Reflection for Easter Five

The vine was one of the most common plants in Israel. It would grow almost everywhere It would grow on walls, or the doors of houses. It would grow in the wild For the vine to grow well , it needed the ground to be prepared carefully and it needed regular attention.

Could it be that with Jesus ,who says , 'I am the vine,' we need to give the same attention? There is no one in whom he will not grow if only the preparation of the 'soil' is properly done. Today we expect instant results , instant responses, instant change and in part they do not happen because we ignore what is happening at the ground level. We tend to ignore the weeds, the poor environment. We want growth without making the effort!

For the vine, it is first necessary to prepare the ground, to see that the atmosphere is good as possible for growth. We need to be sure that it will not be choked by weeds or die through lack of attention. My mind goes back to a church that 'sprung up'. It was very successful. It made the news. The problem is that many of its new adherents didn't last because they had not been sustained. Indeed neighbouring churches found themselves picking up the pieces!!.

It's wonderful when growth comes. For a long time it may seem that nothing is happening; then suddenly the growth speeds up. In the first three years the vine is not allowed to fruit so that it can conserve its life and energy.

The vine has two kinds of branches ;one is fruit bearing and the other is not. The non - fruit bearing branches are drastically cut off so that they won't take away energy and strength from the plant. The vine will not produce a good crop without pruning. We are all meant to bear fruit in one way or another.

Jesus says he is the whole vine and we are the branches. We are NOT separate from Jesus. Without him we cannot bear fruit. We're not without him. Without him we cannot bear fruit. We dwell in him and he in us. Without him our lives will wither. If we abide in him and he in us , his life flows in us and through us. We are one with him and one in him. Then we are the vine and we are called to be Christ in the world.

RG