

Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cycle B - May 2, 2021



OPENING PRAYER

Guide: *I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.*

All: **Help us to remain in you to bear much fruit, O Lord.**

Leader: I will give thanks to you, for you have been my savior.

All: **Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.**

Guide: *We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send, Lord your spirit and renew the face of the earth. Oh God, that you have instructed the hearts of your faithful with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us through the same spirit that always enjoy her divine consolation. By Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING [Acts 9 (26-31)]

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord. He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him. And when the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him on his way to Tarsus. The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.

Saul, who later came to be called Paul, was a persecutor of the early Christians until the risen Jesus himself appeared to him personally. From that very special encounter, Paul not only had himself baptized, but also proclaimed himself an "apostle" (that is, sent) of Jesus Christ. And the facts show that he took his mission very seriously. Obviously, the Christians of Jerusalem distrust this recent convert, and it was up to Barnabas, an important figure among the first Christians (he was the evangelist Mark's uncle, by the way), to lower the pressure among Christians to accept Paul in their midst. .

However, the most unfavorable reaction appears from the Jews who do not accept the Christian message, especially from those who lived outside Palestine, that is, those who spoke Greek instead of Aramaic or Hebrew. Coincidentally, Paul came from one of those regions, since he was born in Tarsus. The situation becomes so complicated that Paul must escape from Palestine to avoid being killed.

The text chosen for the first reading adds that at that time Christians lived in peace in Palestine (that is, Judea, Galilee and Samaria). The author Luke insists several times in his writing on the image of peace and harmony that highlights the presence of God in life and in the growth of the Church.

- (1) Read the verses before this passage in the same chapter 9. What is narrated?
- (2) In the passage read in the previous question, is it said that Paul was riding a horse? So does it make sense to continue the erroneous custom of saying "Paul fell off the horse"?
- (3) Was it easy for Paul to start preaching the Gospel? Why?
- (4) What may be the difficulties or obstacles for us to preach the Gospel?

SECOND READING [1 John 3 (18-24)]

Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.

Saint John the Evangelist insists a lot on the theme of love in this letter. He highlights the element of love as a very important sign of the Christian life. However, he anticipates what many of us have felt, of wanting to reduce love to just a beautiful word. Juan insists that we must move from statement to conviction. From wishes and feelings to action and concrete facts that testify that one lives in that state of love. The faith in Christ is indisputably linked to the exercise of the commandment of love that he left us. We cannot be a Christian and not love. Others should recognize us as Christians not because of the way we dress, or because there is a crucifix hanging around our neck, but because we bring love into our lives in a way that is noticed by all.

Also, living this love is what gives true inner peace. Those who love in the way proposed by Jesus Christ and remembered in this letter by John have nothing to fear, not even of their weaknesses and sins, since they are in the hands of God. Whoever loves others in the proposed way has the Spirit of God. He carries within himself the divine presence that gives full life.

- (1) What draws your attention the most from this text? Why?
- (2) Read 1 John 4 (18). How do you understand this paragraph? What kind of fear is this verse referring to? (Key: read the preceding verse)
- (3) Read 1 John 4 (19). What do you think of this verse? Does it seem very hard? Just? Easy to comply? Is there something that you have to do regarding what is raised there?

GOSPEL [John 15 (1-8)]

Jesus said to his disciples:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

Remain in me, as I remain in you.

Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.

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. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”



In the Gospel of John, we find a group of chapters that make up the farewell of Jesus Christ in the context of the Last Supper. Within this is the text that we are now studying.

For those who do not know, the vine is the plant that produces the grapes, and the branches are entangled in the structure built so that the plant grows "climbing". We could translate in other words, that Jesus says: "I am the plant and you are the branches. When the branches are detached from the tree, they do not have life and cannot bear fruit".

In the Old Testament there are several texts that refer to the vineyard and its plants (that is, the vine). Jesus takes advantage of this to declare that he represents the vine that is "true", to differentiate himself from others that bear bitter fruit and cannot be used.

However, the accent is not on this, but on how important it is for Christians to stick to the trunk that flows the life-giving sap. If a disciple separates from Jesus Christ, stops bearing fruit. The Christians are not fruitful by themselves, for they depend on their attachment to Christ. The Church is not effective because she is very well organized, or because her finances are balanced, or because her standards are fully followed. Efficacy does not depend on strategic, technical or economic means, but on attention to Jesus and openness to the Holy Spirit.

And what is the "trick" to stay united to Jesus Christ? He explains it himself when he says: "... if my words remain in you ...". This way of staying united to Jesus Christ, added to a persevering prayer, will allow obtaining the expected benefits. This union with Jesus Christ is not occasional. Nor does it happen automatically when one recognizes that Jesus Christ is God, King, and Savior. This union needs to be nurtured, cared for. Just as the branches must be pruned, stripped of the dead, and protected from plagues, so our union with the Lord must be treated delicately and must receive our best care. Faith and love need from time to time to be freed from impurities and obstacles that prevent them from growing.

- (1) Read Isaiah 5 (1-4). Compare with the Gospel passage that we are reflecting on.
- (2) We can read "the branch that does not bear fruit the vine grower pulls up, and the one that bears fruit he prunes so that it bears more fruit". What does this mean?
- (3) Continuing with the previous question, the branch that receives the pruning, do you think it feels pain? Are all pain or suffering a negative thing?
- (4) According to the Gospel, what does the glory of the Father consist of? Does he get a lot of praise? Does God expect something else?
- (5) To what extent are we willing to render glory to God through the proliferation of evangelical fruits? In what areas could we do better?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*