

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

- The vine and the branches...
  - is a wonderful image...of God's life and love...
    - and of how we are to remain rooted in Him...
    - in order to bear much fruit in our lives.
  - And one thing that's vital...
    - for bearing a lot of fruit...is pruning.
- When I lived in Rome as a seminarian...
  - I can still remember the first time I saw the Italians...
    - pruning the trees at our school.
  - Honestly I didn't know that they were pruning them.
    - They cut so much off the trees...
      - that I literally thought they were tearing them out.
    - There was nothing left but a trunk...
      - and some nubs sticking out!
  - I thought they killed the trees...but they didn't...
    - in that climate...
      - and with that particular kind of tree...
      - they grew back fast...
      - producing long and strong branches.
    - Oh me of little faith!
- God's Word...is what prunes us.
  - It can be painful...to hear the Truth spoken to us...
    - it comes in words of judgment...
    - and in feelings of guilt...that convict us.
  - As a two edged sword...
    - His Word cuts right through to our heart...
    - and can make us feel dead.
  - But in reality...
    - it's only...trying to cut out...what is already dead...
    - so that new life...can begin to grow.
  - And so when God prunes us...it's always out of love.
- Along with being pruned...
  - in order to bear a lot of fruit...
    - it is also vital...that we "*remain*" in God.
  - We hear this word "*remain*"...
    - seven times...in this short passage...
    - so something very important is being said here.
  - I suppose it could mean something like:
    - "*Remain here while I go to get some ice cream.*"
  - But the Greek word that's used here...is also used in Matthew 11:23:
    - "*And as for you, Capernaum: 'Will you be exalted to heaven? [No.] You will go down to the netherworld.' For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*"

- So to “*remain*” in God...means...to continue to exist.
  - We simply cannot exist without Him and His love...
    - we cannot have life.
    - We are to “*remain*” in Jesus...
    - even as He “*remains*” in us...
  - And following the Commandments is what roots us in His love.
    - That’s how we “*remain.*”
  - While Him actively loving us...
    - that’s how Jesus “*remains*” in us.
  - Because...if He stops loving us...even for a second...we will cease to exist.
    - That’s also true...of the souls in hell.
- Remember that by His nature God is Love...
  - and He cannot act contrary to His nature...
    - so God freely and eternally loves us...no matter what.
    - But they refuse to cooperate with that love...for all eternity.
  - So really they’re hanging on by a thread...
    - in that they only exist...because He loves them.
  - But even that fact...
    - that their existence comes from God...
      - and that He continues to love them...
    - even that...causes them to hate Him.
  - So why does He still love them?
    - Aside from His nature...I honestly couldn’t say...
  - Those kinds of questions remind me...
    - that God’s ways...are not our ways.
  - They should also remind us...
    - to be grateful for His love...that He so freely gives...
    - and that I am so unworthy to receive...
    - because I so often refuse...to pass it on.
- So how do people end up there...withered up and thrown into the fire?
  - Well it’s not a onetime decision.
    - Little by little...we harden our hearts...
    - and we begin to take the things...that God gives us...for granted.
  - We either refuse to pass them on...
    - claiming them as our own...
  - Or we flat out block God’s gifts...
    - refusing to receive them in the first place...
    - until eventually...and for all eternity...
    - we no longer want to receive His love...much less pass it on.
- Now of course Heaven is the opposite.
  - Heaven is being in a perfect relationship with God...and with others...
    - of perfectly receiving and passing on His love.
  - So it’s not so much a place...
    - as it is a right relationship...with God and with others.

- And how do we draw closer to heaven?
  - Well this isn't a onetime decision either...
    - we are not saved by one choice.
  - Little by little we open our hearts...
    - to receive more and more of God's love...
    - as well as choosing to share more of it with others.
  - Freely we receive from the Lord...
    - and freely we are to give.
  - It is just like a tree trunk...
    - receiving life giving nourishment...from the root...
    - and then passing it on...to the branches.
  - And so...
    - to the extent that we cooperate...
      - in receiving and passing on His love...
    - to that extent...
      - we actually help create...heaven on earth.
    - And to the extent that we block that love...
      - we are literally creating...hell on earth.
  - And so...as Jesus loves us...we must love others.
    - As Jesus forgives us...we must forgive others.
    - As Jesus gives us bread...
      - we must break it and share it with those in need.
- And prayer is at the heart of all of this...
  - soaking in God's Word...
    - allowing Him to prune us...
    - and bringing the things that convict us...
    - to confession.
  - Prayer is also how we expose our souls...to the Divine sunlight...
    - remaining in His love...that is needed to grow.
- For Mother Teresa of Calcutta...
  - listening to God in prayer...
  - was the very first link...in the sacred chain of interior peace.
- Here's how she put it:
 

*The fruit of silence is prayer;  
the fruit of prayer is faith;  
the fruit of faith is love;  
the fruit of love is service;  
the fruit of service is peace...*
- But it all starts with silence...
  - so spend some time with the Lord in silence...
  - go and bear fruit that will last.