

5 Easter Friday 2020
JN 15:12-17

This morning's gospel to "REMAIN" concludes Our Blessed Lord's teaching on the vine and the branches, rooted in the Old Testament, Isaiah Chapter 5, to be exact, in a story about a vineyard, that started out all well and good, but quickly turned bad:

My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: what more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: take away its hedge, break through its walls, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin!"

Isaiah probably told the story in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating Israel's journey through the desert, in the context of the cheerful atmosphere characteristic of this eight day feast. Imagine many different sorts of performances going on at the feast, and the Prophet Isaiah himself mingling with the celebrating people and announcing a love story about his friend and his vineyard.

But then it suddenly became very clear to Isaiah's listeners that the vineyard was Israel – the story was about the very people who were present at the Feast. God gave them the way of justice in the Torah, He loved them, he did everything for them, and they have answered Him with unjust action and a regime of injustice. What seemed like a love story was actually a story of judgment. It ended on a gloomy note – that of Israel's abandonment of God, with no sign at this stage in Israel's history of any further promise.

Despite everything that happened to Israel since that Feast of Tabernacles when Isaiah told the story in the midst of the people, Israel found itself again in essentially the same situation at the time when Our Blessed Lord lived, Who spoke to the heart of His people.

Recall the Parable of the Wicket Tenants, where Jesus did not use a vine as the image of Israel, but rather the image of wicked tenants of a vineyard whose owner had gone on a journey. The history of God's constant struggle for and with Israel was depicted in a series of servants who came at the owner's order to collect the grapes. The history of the prophets, their suffering and death appear throughout the parable, where

the servants were manhandled and killed. Eventually, the land owner sent his son, whom the tenants also seized and killed.

Once again, history suddenly entered the present. As Isaiah's listeners realized he was talking about them in his story about a vineyard, so Jesus' listeners realized the parable was about them and Him in the parable of the tenants of a vineyard. Jesus said in so many words, "I'm talking to you about Me!"

Yet, if we open our eyes, isn't what was said in the parable actually a description of our present world with the actions of our Communist brothers and sisters who do not believe there is a God. This way, they do not belong to God, and they can do as they please. Get rid of, or have no God, and there is no measuring rod above us; we are our own measure and the "vineyard" belongs to us.

Jesus says no. The vineyard, the vine is not Israel. I am the true vine. And the words "I AM," that is God, and "true" are the important things to notice about this saying, in that I am the vine and the vineyard belongs to Him!

What is also important is the theme of purification. Every branch that does not bear fruit will be pruned so that it bears more fruit. The vine is cut back. The vine becomes smaller so that it can grow again.

If you read the entire discourse of the Vine and the branches, there is one word that repeats 11 times, and that word is “REMAIN:”

- ✓ REMAIN in me as I REMAIN in you
- ✓ Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own . . . so neither can you unless you REMAIN in me
- ✓ Whoever REMAINS in me and I in him will bear much fruit
- ✓ Anyone who does not REMAIN in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither
- ✓ If you REMAIN in me and my words REMAIN in you . . .
- ✓ REMAIN in my love
- ✓ You will REMAIN in my love
- ✓ Just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and REMAIN in his love
- ✓ It was I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will REMAIN

Remain. Remain close to Our Blessed Lord during this pandemic. In the course of human behavior, one has a conscience, whether one believes in God or not. And while the current Communist regime may be evil personified, they must know they’ve more than pushed the envelope on this one. They crossed the line a mile back. And they will be pruned, most probably in this life, most definitely in the next. But that is

not our concern. It is the concern of world leaders and it's the concern of Our Blessed Lord, in whom justice and mercy meet.

Remaining faithful, remaining close to Our Blessed Lord, as branches on the Vine, we will do our part. We will pray for the leaders of China. We will pray for our world leaders. We will pray restitution will be made. We will pray parameters will be put in place so something like this will never happen again.