

## May 2, 2021

### Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jesus uses a powerful image in the Gospel today to encourage us to remain in him. It is the image of the vine and the branches. Sometime branches have to be pruned in order for new growth to happen and to produce a rich harvest. I don't have any grapevines in garden, but I do have different kinds of flowers. Some types of flowers have to be pruned of dead branches so that new flowers and take full bloom. I was reminded of this as I picked off last year's dead flowers year from hydrangea bushes around the rectory. I have here examples of how that simple task applies to the Gospel today. **(Lift up a bouquet of dead hydrangeas).**

Jesus says the words of today's Gospel at the last supper on the night before he died. He tells them to remain in him, even as the Jesus that they had come to know and love who preached with authority and who worked wonders and serve would soon die a horrible death of a criminal on a cross. Their idea of who Jesus was as the messiah **(clip a flower)** had to be cut back to allow for new growth. From his death on the cross would burst forth the flower of the new life of his resurrection. They then came to know the resurrected Lord in his many appearances to them. They went from fear to being stunned to the joy of belief in him. Two weeks from today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. He had to prepare them for his departure, that he had to return to his Father in heaven, that he would not leave them orphaned that he would send the Holy Spirit. They did not fully understand what he was saying, so he ascended and they no longer could see him. Again, the idea that they had of the risen Lord) **(clip a dead flower)** had to be trimmed back to allow for something, new, something they could not imagine. The Ascension opened up the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The power of the Holy Spirit removed every fear and doubt, **(clip another dead flower)** the Apostles experienced the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They were filled with wisdom and understanding of all that Jesus said and die and become bold preachers of the name of Jesus. The Church was born. Every one of the Apostles died a martyr's in imitation of Jesus who gave his life for our sakes death except for John who gave his life to caring for Blessed Virgin Mary.

We see in the pattern nature reflects the mystery of our salvation. Jesus's death on the cross leads us to new and eternal life. He nailed to the cross everything that he hates, sin and the power of death itself. He embraced on the cross everything that love, he loves fulfilling the will of the Father, he loves us in our weakness.

For a number of years there have pressures that we have experienced in our society that have been a cause of concern for people of faith and others of good will. There have been increased pressures on the family. While there are good things about having both parents work outside of the home, families often have been on the go so much that they rarely have a meal together. The sense of isolation and loneliness in the has increased. For the first time in the United States

more people do not identify themselves with a faith community than do. With that, there is a downward trend in volunteerism and charitable giving. In the face of the issues of racism that have been so prevalent this year and people raised their voices in righteous indignation, other voices who forgot or even denied the biblical guidance of the teaching, leadership and preaching of Dr. Martin Luther King replaced it with philosophies that lead to destruction and violence in our cities. The divisions in our body politic, the Church, our families seem to be greater than ever. Huge battles can happen over something as simple as wearing a mask in the face of a pandemic.

In the face of all that we have faced in the past year, Pope Francis insists that we must prune everything that divides us into competing tribes and to allow a new understanding of the dignity of every person and all peoples. The Pope says that we cannot let this time of crisis, which is also a “clarifying moment” pass us without renewing our commitment to the dignity of the human person, the strength of unity in diversity, which is a sign of God’s closeness to us in difficult times.

Even here at St. Louise, we need to “cut back” from how we have thought of ourselves. We are no longer the parish of twenty years ago of over 3,000 households, the biggest parish in the Archdiocese. Today, we hover around 2,000 households. We are no longer the parish of even eleven years ago that was able to pay off the \$11 million-dollar cost of building the new school and faith formation center in just a few years. Today we are counting every penny just to pay our bills. If we have the courage to cut back from our old way of thinking and trust that Holy Spirit will lead us to something new, maybe, just maybe a new Pentecost will happen for the Church to be an even better instrument to renew the face of the earth.