

## **My Rights**

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year B)

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Over the past century, there has been a growing awareness of human rights. Each individual person has basic rights given to them by the creator that must be respected by all. This is a positive development in human history and one that we hope continues to gain traction in every segment of society, including our churches. However, we are now entering into a time when individual human rights are so valued that we are becoming very individualistic. Wars, political disagreements, and family disputes are now being fought by two people or two sides claiming that they have rights and that the other side is violating them. The pandemic has brought some of these tensions out. The truth is that individual human rights are great, especially the more foundational ones, but they are not always the only factor.

In his document *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis gives us an important insight. He writes, “indeed, justice requires recognizing and respecting not only the rights of individuals, but also social rights and the rights of peoples.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 126) In other words, rights are not only for individuals, but also for whole groups of people. This means that the common good stands on equal footing with our individual human rights. Whenever individual rights are at odds with each other, the answer isn't always to fight it out, but to look at what's best for the larger group or society. Sometimes that involves stepping back and going along with the interests of the common good. This is not to compromise on one's values, but to acknowledge that one is not the center of the universe.

Whenever we focus exclusively on our own individual rights as the only thing that matters, we start to lose our connection to other people. At first, we may be OK with this. We may be OK with burning bridges. But overtime, being too disconnected from others can become a terrible burden to carry. We lose our ability to cooperate, dialogue, and participate in civil society as adults. As Fr. Richard Rohr asks, what is more important, that I be correct or that I be connected? It is a hard question for us to answer.

Our Gospel this weekend is about the priority of being connected. In it, Jesus says, “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.” By being connected to Jesus, the vine, we are connected to all the other branches as well. If we lose these connections, we will wither and die.

*I should be concerned with my own individual rights, but also with the common good because the common good connects us all together.*

Have I fought for my rights at the expense of being connected to the broader community?

There will always be moments when we have to go out on our own and fight for our individual rights, especially in serious matters. Outside of these times, let us dedicate ourselves to the common good and the rights of whole groups of people. Let us value our connection to each other and work together as one plant tended by God, the vine grower. May we produce fruit together. May we praise the Lord not as isolated individuals, but, in the words of the psalm today, as the assembly of God’s people.