



Homily for 7/19/2020

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Extraordinary Form

If you go to the grocery store these days, in the produce aisle you will find a very curious thing: sterile fruit. A contradiction in terms. Fruit is supposed to be, well, fruitful. But as you pass up and down the aisle you will encounter the phenomenon of seedless grapes. I had not realized how prevalent these fruitless fruits were and how pervasive and accepted it was till I was in Italy for my seminary studies. There, grapes are life. Grapes are not only fruit for eating, they are used to make juices, jams, preserves, wines and even liquor in the form of Grappa. Vineyards of grapes dot the Italian countryside as prolifically as “See Rock City” signs dot the barns of the rural South. But when I got to that noble and ancient country of Italy and partook of my first bunch of grapes I was mightily surprised to find that inside each and every one of them was a little, bitter seed that had to be carefully eaten around and spit out lest they spoil the sweet succulence of the grape. How inconvenient! Had they never heard of seedless grapes? No. The Italians have grown up with the natural understanding of fruit and they know the power and import of that little seed. Planted into the ground it will produce the bedrocks of their way of life, food, wine and spirit. So no, seedless grapes are not a normal part of Italian living. No true blooded Italian ever deigned to stoop to such low estate as to eat a fruitless fruit. Nor should we for that matter.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I like seedless grapes – all the great taste with none of the inconveniences of the seed. I like them because they are convenient. But we cannot fail to admit, convenient as they may be, they are sterile. But we have them because we don’t like the inconvenience of the seeds. On the other hand, with the seeded grapes, you have to be cautious - attentive while eating, not careless. One mis-bite and the bitterness of the seed rushes in. Maybe a tooth ache will follow. Then there is the nasty little pile of grape seeds that must be disposed of. Children must be carefully taught how to excise the seed and spit it out lest they choke. Yes, grapes with seeds are mightily inconvenient. But they are fruitful.

“By their fruits you shall know them” admonishes Jesus Christ. Our savior then rhetorically asks, “Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistle?” “Of course not,” is the rightly supposed answer. But Our Lord goes on to emphatically proclaim that “every good tree brings forth good fruit and the evil tree brings forth evil fruit.” I would ask for the sake of this point, “What does the sterile tree bring forth?” All the same, only the tree that brings for good fruit will be saved all others will be cut down. “Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire.” Evil trees produce evil fruit, but sterile trees produce no fruit at all.

In the same manner as the natural, so goes the spiritual. This is reiterated by Our Lord when He says, “Not everyone who says to me “Lord, lord” shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven.” These are tough and challenging words to us. We are called to bear spiritual fruit. But this spiritual fruit is only had by the Grace of the Cross of Christ accepted into our lives. That means that we have to accept suffering for love’s sake, mercy for our neighbor’s sake, and sacrifice for God’s sake. But all of these things are inconvenient, and in the end mean death to self, death being the greatest inconvenience of them all. The constant struggle of Christ-like living is especially complicated by our so-called “modern sensibilities,” so accustomed to the conveniences afforded by technology and science. These advances in knowledge and technique are good in themselves. Many advances have been made that have improved the living situation of human beings, bringing us out of destitution and desolation. But what we have failed to do was put a check on the physical flourishing of man when it began to threaten our spiritual well-being. The historical record accurately shows that man has been able, with the help of Divine Grace, to flourish even in the midst of adversity – this, in particular, on account of man’s spiritual nature by which he exercises a supernatural power over the natural elements of the world. The spirit of man has overcome many a natural adversity. But this is a two-edged



sword. The more man flourishes and riches grow in abundance, the easier it is for man to forget that he is a spiritual being first and foremost and that this spirit must be fed and watered just as much as his body. We begin to drown in our own abundance. You cannot serve both God and mammon. God is invisible, but real. Mammon is physical but deceptively artificial. The true value is that which lasts forever, as that which is susceptible to corruption or decay is of lesser value than that which will endure into eternity. Our bodies will pass away into the grave, but our souls will stand before the judgement seat of the Almighty and Eternal God. And yet, which thing gets more attention in our daily living, the body or the soul?

Nowadays, we hold up things as valuable that have no natural value. Our money is imaginary and our entertainment virtual. We celebrate the chaotic lives of celebrities who contribute erroneous and bad ideas to us about our final ends but burn and deface the images, statues and edifices that were so nobly erected by our ancestors in faith that point us to our true end in God.

We live in a culture now that idolizes convenience. We would rather kill a baby in the womb than bear the consequences of the seeds of man. We go one step further and render the man and the woman artificially incapable of conceiving so that we can enjoy the sweetness of embrace without the inconvenience of the seed. We have desired to carry this sterile seed-lessness over into all walks of life. We want the good things without the inconveniences. We want the produce aisle without the sweat of the brow; fruit without toil; safety without authority; tranquility without obedience; mercy without justice. We want love without suffering. We want religion without sacrifice. No wonder, then, that the world rejects a religion that preaches these very inconvenient truths – that mercy is the completion of justice, suffering is the greatest act of love and that sacrifice is the essence of true religion. Even worse than rejecting it, the world now tries to imitate all the things it likes in religion, but it takes out the very things that make it fruitful. Like seedless grapes, we are rendering religion sterile.

That is why for a restoration of authentic culture and the true and fruitful flourishing of man we need a restoration of authentic worship: authentic worship that has at its center the seed of sacrifice, the embrace of crucified love, and repentance as the humble ask for mercy. It must be God-centered worship, not man-pleasing. There is a need to shift from the understanding that coming to church is about conforming God's ways to man's, and rather return to the right notion that coming to church is about conforming man's ways to God. There is a need to surrender our wills to His. There is a need to surrender to God and His order. St. Paul sums this up for us in the Epistle when he says, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free from justice. But what fruit did you reap? Now you are ashamed of those things and their goal is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit of this is that you be made holy and your goal is eternal life."

When we come to Mass it must be to render worship unto God in accord with His will, not ours. Coming to Church is not about convenience. In fact, like the seeded grape, it may take planning, effort, diligence, in order for it to bear the intended fruit. One must be patient with multi-layered mystery. The More Ancient Use of the Roman Rite, inherited in the patrimony of faith passed on to us from our ancestors in faith, teaches us this lesson in droves. It is an entirely God-centered liturgy, in its direction, *ad Dominum*, in its words, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, in its mystery, in its silence, in its beauty. All these elements have been handed on to us as a way of entering into the ways of God and conforming ourselves to Him in the mystery of His love for us. To come to Mass in this *Usus Antiquior* is to be healed of the conveniences of the world and to be freed from the slavery of the old man and to put on the maniple of service towards the Divine Mysteries according to His time and His right ordering of the universe. The prayer we will pray after communion sums this up saying, "May Your healing work, O Lord, both mercifully free us from our perversities, but also lead us to those things which are right."

May it be so.