

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

### HOMILY

Today we hear another one of the famous “I AM” statements of Jesus in which He identifies Himself with a vine, declaring, ‘I am the true vine’, and he then identifies his disciples, all of us, with the branches of the vine, ‘you are the branches’. Through this parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus speaks of the relationship of God with us and our need to be in communion with Him. “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit”. He calls us to be in communion with Him that we may bear much fruits in our Christian lives. Our identity with Jesus is as that of a branch with the vine. Only through our identity with Jesus and having faith and trust in Him we can bear the fruits in our Christian lives. Jesus says, “Without me you can do nothing”. Jesus also promises us that God’s blessings through him, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want, and it will be done for you.” So, to be connected to Jesus means that we need to produce fruits as well. If we are united with him, but we do not bear fruits, we are just like parasites attached to the vine. The heavenly Father will cut us off from the tree. Being attached to Jesus means being detached from everything that detaches ourselves from God. Being attached to Jesus also means being with Jesus and becoming Jesus in the way we think, feel, and act. We can be united with Jesus, the true Vine and become fruit-bearing branches through our personal prayer, frequenting of the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, daily and meditative reading of the Bible, and selfless, loving acts of kindness and mercy towards others.

Jesus speaks of pruning the vine. Pruning is done for various reasons. First, pruning is done to direct the growth of the plant by allowing new sprouts to develop only in certain areas. It means we need to direct our lives and allow new growth according to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes God wants our lives to develop in new and specific directions, and one of the ways the Lord can motivate that growth within us is by blocking growth in our existing direction. Second, pruning is done in order to cut off the “dead” branches that could not bear fruit. Jesus specifically tells us that we as disciples become dead branches if we fail to abide in Him. Third, pruning involves removing the smaller shoots on the vine so that the nutrients could be directed to the main fruit-bearing branches. It means that we need to “prune” away those things that have become distractions in our lives so that we can focus our time and energy in the direction God wants. We need pruning in our Christian life, cutting out of our lives everything that is contrary to the spirit of Jesus. We need to abide in Christ and let Christ abide in us: Jesus also says, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.” As Jesus glorified the Father by his sacrificial love, we need to glorify the Father by bearing fruits of kindness, mercy, charity, and holiness and by fulfilling the command of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you”. As St. Paul said, “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives within me,” (Gal 2:20 and “Who can separate me from the love of God?” We will be able to say only if we abide in Jesus.” Let us ask the Lord, the true Vine, for the grace that we persevere to be his branches, in Communion with Him that we may bear much fruit. Amen.