

## **5th (SJ&QA) Sunday of Easter Year B**

Growing up in a rural community gave me a rich awareness about agriculture. It is said, a good farmer uses resources, time, energy and sacrifices just to see the day when his fruit-bearing plants realize their true potential. He prunes to improve crop yield. Pruning is necessary to guarantee a good fruit-bearing season for all trees in the orchard. To prune is to cut individual branches or parts from branches to improve growth and harvest. It is such tiresome work that requires a lot of patience, diligence and knowledge about the environment and the ever-changing weather conditions. With unnecessary or surplus parts removed, the nutrients of the plant or tree are distributed to the parts that need them most. It is basic to every farmer's survival that his plant must not simply bear fruit, but in terms of quality and quantity, must bear better fruit.

In the scriptures God's love covenant for his people is symbolized by a vine grower who expectantly tends his vineyard (Israel). The image of the vine used in our Gospel is actually not a new one. It runs in the tradition of Israel and has always been present in the bible. It refers to Israel in relation to Yahweh. Israel is the choice vine planted by Yahweh himself which, unfortunately, degenerated and became a wild vine. Jesus takes the same metaphor applying it to himself. *"I am the true vine, my father is the vine grower."* The Jews were supposed to be grafted and rooted to Jesus. Many times in the Old Testament the

religious and national entity Israel was referred to as the vine. So when Jesus claimed that He was now the vine it is an invitation for the Israelites to shift their loyalty from Jewish nationalism to the person and message of Christ. To make sure they get it Jesus makes the claim that he is not just the vine but the *true* vine. The word '*true*' signifies that which is real, authentic and valid.

We are like vine branches; we need a vine in which to graft and root ourselves. To whichever we are grafted and rooted, it immediately conditions and determines how we see ourselves and what we do with our lives. *How shall we know we remain in Jesus and He in us?* The answer is given in our second reading: "*Those who keep his commandments remain in him.*" What John has in mind is the new commandment, that we love one another—"not in word or speech but in action and truth." This is the kind of love Barnabas extends to Paul as we heard from our first reading. We should see ourselves in terms of our oneness with Christ just as the branch and the vine are one. Only then shall we be able to bear good fruit. The truth is we are **called to fruitfulness** and the key to achieve this is through **faithfulness**. To '*bear fruit*' is to have fraternal love using individual talents in the service of our brothers and sisters. It does not matter what our talents are. What counts is that we use them for service. As St. Ignatius said, "*For the Greater Glory of God.*"

*What parts of you have to be pruned that you may bear fruit pleasing to the Lord?* Usually, in the springtime of our life, young, free and when it is power and glory we aspire to, we tend to run ahead and run away from the Lord. Not only have we forgotten Him at times we even challenge Him. Believing that we can do it our way and get ahead by ourselves, until some trial; then some pruning makes us realize that we do need Him. Such is the human condition. But the good news is; God always welcomes us home, *without limits, without conditions*. Too good to be true, but it is true. God loves you more than you know, more than you realize, more than you can imagine, more than you allow yourself to be loved.

*Stay connected, be in touch with Jesus.* Apart and away from him, we can do nothing. Through thick and thin we should hold on to the Lord. *Follow Jesus. Don't run away. Just stay and you won't go astray. It pays to obey and stay.* When we look back, the most painful and unhappiest moments of our lives happened because we did not obey. These were moments when we chose not to remain in His love. The reading from John's letter spells out some of them: learning from the Savior what authentic 'love' is; finding the trust in God which overcomes all our deepest fears and self-doubts; the unspeakable privilege of the divine indwelling; and finally the gift of God's own Spirit. A branch that is cut off from the tree withers and dies. A person cut off from his family or community will have a very difficult life.

Human experience tells us that in order to survive and have a fruitful life, we need a life-giving source, be it a parent, a family or a community. *To be fruitful is to be empowered by Jesus Himself to continue his mission.* In our spiritual life, we need Him as surely as a branch needs to be united with the vine. *Without him, we cannot do anything. We need Jesus to reconcile us with the Father. We need his grace that we may be able to do good. We need his spirit to give us the strength to face the sufferings and the adversities of life.* **We pray: may we never be separated from Christ, and that we may come closer to one another. Amen!**