

FR. JINS HOMILY
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Donald Grey Barnhouse talks about a grapevine in Hampton Court near London that is about 1,000 years old. It has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. Because of skillful cutting and pruning, the vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Even though some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem, they bear much fruit because they are joined to the vine and allow the life of the vine to flow through them.— If we, the branches, are not bearing much fruit, it may be that we are not feeding as we ought upon the life-giving flow from the vine. “Abide in me as I abide in you,” Jesus said, The great truth that Jesus is trying to tell us is that if we want life in all its fullness, then we must be consciously, intentionally connected to Jesus, the “true vine,” and the only source of the God-Life/Sanctifying Grace, which begins in us our eternal life here on earth.

Today’s Scripture selections emphasize the need for Christians to abide in Christ as a condition for producing the Spirit’s fruits of kindness, mercy, charity, and holiness.

The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, testifies to the abundance of spiritual fruits yielded by the apostles because of their close bond with the risen Lord. The reading tells us how the Lord pruned the former fanatical Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who had persecuted the Church, to produce a fruit-bearing branch called Paul, the zealous Apostle to the Gentiles, a man now entirely dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel. Even Paul’s forced return to Tarsus for a brief period is an example of God’s pruning of the vine to bring forth a greater harvest, namely, the mission to the Gentiles. In today’s Responsorial Psalm we sing the end of Ps 22, “... to Him My soul shall live ... let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the Justice He has shown,” drawing our strength from Jesus’ courage and trust in His Father. In today’s second reading, John, in his first letter to the Church, explains that only if we remain united with Christ by putting our Faith in him and drawing our spiritual strength from him, will we be able to obey God’s commandments, especially the commandment of love. In the Gospel, taken from the Last Supper discourse, Jesus uses God’s Old Testament image of the vine and branches to help his disciples

understand the closeness of their relationship with him and the necessity of their maintaining it. They are not simply rabbi and disciples. Their lives are mutually dependent – as close as a vine and its branches. In fact, in using this image, Jesus is explaining to them and us what our relationship with him should become.

We need pruning in our Christian life. Cutting out of our lives everything contrary to the spirit of Jesus and renewing our commitment to Christian ideals in our lives every day is the first type of self-imposed pruning expected of us. A second means of pruning is practicing self-control over our evil inclinations, sinful addictions, and aberrations. Cordial mingling in our neighborhood and society with people of different cultures, races, religions, and orientations enables us, with God's grace, to prune away our selfish, judgmental, prejudicial tendencies so that we can treat others in our society with Christian charity and openness. Jesus prunes, purifies, and strengthens us by enabling us to face with the courage of our Christian convictions, the pain and sufferings, contradictions and difficulties which He permits to enter our lives.

Let us abide in Christ and let Christ abide in us. The four Gospels teach us how to become true disciples of Jesus and how to abide in him as branches abide in the main trunk of the vine and how to draw their life from the vine. Personal and liturgical prayers, frequenting of the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, daily and meditative reading of the Bible, and selfless, loving acts of kindness, mercy, and mutual loving forgiveness, all the fruits of God's Grace acting within us, assist us in abiding in Jesus, the true Vine, as fruit-bearing branches.