

5th Sunday of Easter
May 2, 2021
“United to Others and to God”

Acts 9:26-31
1 Jn 3:18-24
Jn 15:1-8

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

People who move into a small town or into a city’s established neighborhood often have difficulty being accepted. Often, they are not trusted. Their style of language, culture, or ethnicity might be different than the majority.

Once, when in Alberta, Canada, and needing assistance, I asked why all the townsfolk were so friendly and helpful. I was told that theirs was an isolated community and that everyone always helped others, no matter who it was – Because they might need help themselves at any moment and that no one could survive there alone for very long, especially during their very harsh winters!

Here, very often, it is very different. There’s a small community, not far from Redding, where it takes years before the locals will accept someone new. In another, farther north, it is even more difficult. Part of the problem is that, in both cases, the locals think that they are fairly self-sufficient themselves and don’t need any newcomers!

The scriptures for today teach us that none of us can make it completely on our own. Yes, we might have to pay “our dues” – prove ourselves – but, nevertheless, no one can do without the benefit of others. We are social creatures. We can each do more and better things together, than we can do isolated and alone.

St. Paul had a powerful experience that changed him and the whole course of his life. He had been a persecutor of early Christians. However, Jesus appeared to him and everything changed. Paul became a champion of Jesus and his Gospel. And, after three years of ministry, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem and verify his thinking and teaching with the Apostles.

But Paul had problems in Jerusalem. He met with resistance. He had been their persecutor! Now he claimed to be one of them – and they would have none of it!

Nevertheless, God inspired Barnabas to accept Paul and become his friend. Consequently, Paul was eventually accepted by the Jerusalem Christian community. They even saved his life from the Hellenists and saw to it that Paul was able to carry on his mission and preach the Gospel elsewhere, in other countries!

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us how important it is for us to be connected to God. The Godhead itself is a connected community. Somehow, beyond our understanding, there are three divine persons in the one, true God.

Because it is paramount that we be connected to the Trinity, the Son joined Himself to our humanity in the person of Jesus. Jesus tells us that he is the vine and that we are the branches. We are to be connected to him if we are to bear fruit. And that fruit is the work that our Father has created us to do and entrusted us to accomplish. To attempt it on our own is foolishness. For we will be cut off and end up in the Hell of discontent.

However, even if we remain attached and productive, the Father will prune us to become better and do even more. God's pruning is the suffering we experience – Especially when that suffering comes from letting go of our ego, our self-love, and our self-service!

Finally, in his First Letter to the early Christians, St. John teaches us that words and speech are never the measure of a person or of their love. The measure of love are deeds and truth. It must be Godly truth and the works we do on behalf of God.

Moreover, the way we can know that we are truly doing God's work and living His truth is if it resonates well in our conscience. If we live in the Holy Spirit, and under its direction, our conscience will always point the way. It will shun and disavow evil – and always embrace and champion the good. This is the truth of God and the work of God!

Brothers and Sisters, the ultimate test of our authenticity as Christians is if we keep God's Commandments and do what pleases God. God's commandment is that we believe in the name of Jesus and love one another.

So, let us pray, that we may always do so – And may we always be part of the Community of Believers – as well as united to that divine community which is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.

May 2, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra