



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Easter | April 29, 2018

We Are the Branches

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Many enduring images of Church come to us from the New Testament. One is Paul's image: "The Body of Christ." Another comes from our Gospel today: "The Vine and the Branches."

Both are metaphors of living organisms. For both, Christ is the most important element. Christ is the head of the Body and the symbol of authority and purpose. Christ is the Vine that brings life and nutrients to the branches that produce fruit. Anyone who has visited a winery knows the significance of the vine. If it's cut, the branches wither and the crop fails.

Why is it important to have both images?

John's image reminds us that the Church can't survive if it's separated from Christ. We can live only if we remain in Christ so that the power of grace can continue to infuse us with everything we need to bear the fruit of love, compassion, and mercy.

Paul's metaphor keeps us humble. Regardless of how this Body is structured, Christ is the true head; we are to submit ourselves in obedience to him regardless of how important we are in this world. We also know we belong as a community to Christ and in communion with one another.

There are many parts to the Body and many clusters of fruit on the vine. To leave either is to separate ourselves from Christ.

That's why praying together each week is so important. It reminds us who we are and to whom we belong.

Let us offer praise for this vine and for this Body into which our baptism has called us. +

Sunday Readings

Acts 9:26–31

The Church ... was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.

1 Jn 3:18–24

Love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.

Jn 15:1–8

[Jesus said,] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower."

A Word From Pope Francis

The Holy Spirit, in the variety of his gifts, unites us and enables us to contribute to the building up of the Church in holiness.... Let us ask the Lord to help us to take an ever more active part in the Church's life and mission.

—General audience,
June 26, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I find ways to regularly read and hear the word of God?
- What symbols would sincerely represent the way I live my life?



John's Gospel: Our Gift

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

One of the treasures of the Church is the Gospel of John. In this work we are given a unique insight into the life of Jesus. Moreover, we are invited to enter into intimate union with Christ, at a personal level and as members of a community.

In the John's Gospel we learn the concept of "blessedness," what it means to live a Christian life. To the extent that we respond to our fourfold baptismal call, we will experience the blessedness John articulates.

Through the other evangelists—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—we see Jesus as someone who is earthly, but also the very presence of God in history. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, presents Jesus as the preexistent one. In becoming human, Jesus reveals the inner workings of divine life. That life is offered to us, and salvation consists precisely in our participation in it. To the extent that we accept Jesus into our lives, we enter into the mystery of salvation.

Through our baptism into the life of Jesus, we are called to maturity, holiness, community, and service. John's Gospel articulate those calls, and provides insights into living them. Responding to the call is the way to a blessed, happy life.

Four Roadmaps

The call to maturity! The mature disciple

is a person of faith. Faith is the opening of our lives to God revealed in Jesus. Everything depends on faith, on our submission to Jesus and his word. Maturity is a lifelong process; faith demands ongoing development. The reading and rereading of the Gospel of John helps us grow into the full stature of Christ.

The call to holiness! Within Catholic tradition, holiness is the perfection of love. John speaks eloquently of the grace of love. In the Last Supper discourse, Jesus speaks profoundly of the values of friendship, intimacy, and love. This love points to union with God and unity among us. The tenderness and force of God's love is overwhelming. And the test? To lay down one's life for others.

It is in John's Gospel that Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches. This image captures the essence of holiness. To the degree that we are united to Jesus, the Vine, then we the branches, can bear fruit that will last forever. Holiness is that union, that oneness which sustains us on our journey.

The call to community! One characteristic of early Christians was the insistence on Jesus' command that its members love one another. Another feature was dedication of the community to the person of Jesus. His vision and values were their compass. They came together because of an outside enemy, the "world," which stood for all that was not good.

The call to service! John depicts Jesus as someone for others. In the Cana miracle of water turned to wine, in the healing of the royal official's son, in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, in the washing of the feet at the Last Supper, in the resurrection accounts—Jesus is serving the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of the people.

Simple Treasure

A great treasure, this Gospel of John. Though complex in many ways, there is an underlying simplicity: Jesus, the preexistent Word of God, is for and with us. We are invited into a life of deep friendship and called to share the gift of light, love, and life with others. God dwells within us; we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me" (14:1). +



Risen Jesus, your abiding presence gives us hope. Help me to be a loving presence to others.

From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 30–May 5, 2018

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:5–18 / Jn 14:21–26

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:19–28 / Jn 14:27–31a

Wednesday, St. Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church:
Acts 15:1–6 / Jn 15:1–8

Thursday, Sts. Philip and James, Apostles: 1 Cor 15:1–8 / Jn 14:6–14

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:22–31 / Jn 15:12–17

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:1–10 / Jn 15:18–21