

HOM 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter B 2021 May 2

You've heard me say many times that its all about oneness with Jesus Christ. The faith of the Church is all about oneness with Jesus. The sacraments are all about oneness with Jesus. Salvation is all about oneness with Jesus. Today's Gospel reading and our second reading help to make this point.

In the Gospel reading Jesus uses a metaphor of a vine and its branches to make a comparison about the necessity we have of remaining united to Him in order to gain eternal life. I AM THE VINE YOU ARE THE BRANCHES, He tells His apostles at the Last Supper. ANYONE WHO DOES NOT REMAIN IN ME...WILL WITHER (like a branch that is detached from the vine and, having thus died, is thrown in a fire). Jesus adds: ANYONE WHO REMAINS IN ME WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT.

Now in the Gospels, to be fruitful or to bear fruit means to help others gain eternal life, and fruitfulness is necessary for our gaining of eternal life. So, everyone who remains in Jesus will bear fruit by helping others to live in oneness with Jesus, just as they themselves do. The question is: HOW DOES A PERSON REMAIN IN JESUS, OR REMAIN UNITED TO JESUS, OR LIVE IN ONENESS WITH JESUS?

In our second reading St. John, the apostle and evangelist, provides an answer where he writes: *"Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them."* He also explains that *"his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us."* Finally, John states that: *"the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us."*

So, there is an objective measure and a subjective measure when it comes to knowing that we are in Christ and He is in us. The objective measure is that we: 1) believe in Him and 2) keep His commandments, which includes the New Commandment of Love – i.e., to love one another as He has loved us.

The subjective measure is an inner peace that the Holy Spirit gives us when we are doing God's will with Jesus who thus remains in us. But as with all things subjective, we can deceive ourselves or otherwise get it wrong. That's why the objective measure of oneness with Jesus is the primary measure.

Here, we need to note, then, another objective measure of oneness with Jesus. In His so-called Bread of Life discourse, found in Chapter Six of John's Gospel account (VS. 56), Jesus says to His disciples: "WHOEVER EATS MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD REMAINS IN ME AND I IN HIM." It is understood that this means worthily receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, that is, receiving Him properly disposed to being one with Him in doing the Father's will. To receive Jesus without being properly disposed i.e., in a state of un-repent mortal sin, is a sacrilege. St. Paul writes that this brings condemnation. (1 Cor. 11: 29)

Notice also the similarity in the wording in what Jesus said about “**remaining in Him**” in His metaphor about the vine and its branches, and in what John said in today’s second reading about **remaining in Jesus** *by believing in Him and keeping his commandments*, and in what Jesus said in the Bread of Life Discourse about the necessity of properly receiving Him in Holy Communion for **remaining in Him**. Putting this all together, we are like fruit-bearing branches united to Jesus, the life-giving vine, if we 1) believe in Him, 2) strive to keep his commandments (including the New Commandment to love one another as He has loved us) and 3) receive Him faithfully and properly in Holy Communion.

As always, this brings us to the matter of Eucharistic Self-Offering, which as we will see, is also necessary for our complete oneness with Jesus. We have all seen a branch of a plant or a shrub or a tree that was broken but not detached? Right? That branch was wilted but not withered. It had some life, but was not fully alive or fruitful. That’s what we are like until we deliberately, freely and without reservation, join in Jesus’ self-offering to the Father unto the Cross and Resurrection...until we join in His oblation for the life of the world...until we, at least by intention, lay down our lives with Him for the salvation of all the willing, beginning with our family and friends.

That’s what Jesus was referring to when He said “I CAME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY.” (John 10: 10). He came so that we can have a complete, fruitful union with Him – oneness with Him in doing the Father’s will. This means complete oneness with Jesus in His Self-Offering. He referred to this when He commanded us to lay down our lives with Him for the true good of others, saying: “I HAVE TOLD YOU THIS SO THAT MY JOY MIGHT BE IN YOU AND YOUR JOY MIGHT BE COMPLETE.” (John 15: 11).

And isn’t that what parents want for their children? Isn’t that what we all want for ourselves and those we hold dear? We should not be surprised that God wants for all of us, that which He possesses in Himself – the fullness of life, the fullness of joy, and the fullness of love which requires that we be fully united to Him in His love for all persons and for all that He has created. And this will take us to the Cross and Resurrection with His Son. It will require us to join in Jesus’ Self-Offering for the salvation of all the willing.

I saw an example of this on EWTN this past week. It was a piece about religious sisters in Venezuela who chose to live among the destitute in the barrios around Caracas. They were sacrificing earthly comforts to help the poorest of the poor by living in solidarity with them and among them and for them, like St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Addressing the people’s lack of running water and sewerage and decent housing and education was their primary work, out of love for Christ. The fruitfulness of their labors is evident not only in the high regard the people have for them, but also in the large number of young women accepting a religious vocation to join them.

But, there is a another dimension of love – of charity – which may be even more difficult to extend to others. That is the dimension of truth. In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*), Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that without truth, charity becomes misguided, meaningless, and even destructive. This is what is happening in our country and elsewhere.

Words are given meaning not grounded in the truth, and truth itself is made subjective, without reference to God or the natural law of right reason. By rejecting objective truth that has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ, and is preserved and authentically proclaimed by His Church -- and that can be known through right reason -- society is self-destructing.

Jesus came to testify to the truth and was crucified for it. In today's first reading, St. Paul, early on, after his conversion to Jesus, spoke the truth boldly to the Hellenists who were Jewish foreigners, and they tried to kill him.

Today, speaking the truth with love and courage about the great issues of our times -- about marriage and family and contraception and abortion and embryonic stem cell research and transgenderism and the need for law and social order, as well as about sin, sacraments, and eternal life -- could bring us derision and much worse. It could take us to Calvary with Jesus. But charity requires this -- our Eucharistic Self-Offering of praise and thanksgiving and loving obedience to God's will requires this -- lest we separate ourselves from Him who is the Vine.

Brothers and sisters, that we might be fruitfully united to Jesus unto Death and Resurrection with Him, I invite you to join me in making or renewing a Eucharistic Self-Offering by praying these words silently and sincerely at Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.