

## 05/03/15 ..... 5 Easter B

-- Last weekend we reflected on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Today we encounter the image of Jesus as the vine which gives life to the branches, meaning all of God's people.

-- This is the last great image of Jesus in the gospel of John. It comes in Jesus' words to his disciples on the night before he died. And it's worth reflecting on for several reasons.

-- First of all, this image describes our intimate connection to the Lord. Yes, it has to be an individual commitment to following Jesus. But it is more than that. The vine we are connected to is the life of the worshipping Christian community.

-- We cannot be Christians on our own. We need the Church. And this isn't just a collection of "like-minded individuals" who come together for a common interest. Some people today seem to wish to transform the Church into that.

-- But take a look at our first reading. Saul had just had his vision of Jesus and realized the one he was persecuting was the Savior. But the disciples were suspicious of him, and understandably so. They easily could have dismissed him as a crazy man or, worse, an underground spy for their persecutors in the Jewish community.

-- Fortunately, they didn't write him off, even though he was not like them. And where would Christianity be were it not for St. Paul? He was hardly a "like-minded individual," but he was God's instrument.

-- So, too, in today's Church, we have people of different backgrounds, customs and political persuasions. Two of the most committed people in the last parish I served would have disagreed on most political issues. But they shared a deep faith in Jesus Christ, and could work with each other as a result.

-- That vine of faith and the life of Christ is more important than all the other "stuff" that we may differ on.

-- Secondly, the image of the pruning of the vine is critical to understand. I would call that image of pruning a “purifying” of our motives. It’s easy to follow the Lord when all is going well, when we are comfortable with our lives.

-- But the real test comes when we are called to leave our comfort zone. I think of some fellow priests who recently have been asked to take assignments they didn’t seek. And I must ask myself whether there are times when I shy away from some task because it is not comfortable.

-- All of us face similar situations when life’s circumstances call us to a place or a task which challenges us to go beyond our comfort zone. Those situations may well be the pruning process which will allow us to bear greater fruit for the sake of God’s life.

-- Yes, we will be happy when we follow the Lord’s calling in life. But that happiness can’t be confused with a mere contentment or comfort. In fact, it may make us uncomfortable for a period of time.

-- Yet, when we are connected to the vine of Christ’s life in the Church, we have the support to carry out our mission, however uncomfortable it might be at times.

-- In a few minutes, we will share in the most intimate and intense participation in Christ’s life. We will approach this altar to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. It is his assurance that he is with us—not simply symbolically, but in a real, life-sustaining presence

-- May the life of Christ we receive today keep us connected to the Lord Jesus and to the community of God’s people which we are all called to serve.