5 Easter B

April 29, 2018

St. Patrick’s

Theme: Quit playing it safe. He wants us to bear “***much*** fruit”!

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In the early part of the 16th century Michelangelo walked about his studio where his pupils were working on their individual canvases. Some he shrugged off, dismissing their work. A few he complimented. Finally Michelangelo stood before his leading disciple. The painter was working on a small canvas. Michelangelo took up a brush and, across the canvas, he wrote in big letters the Latin word, “amplius.” It means “larger.” The master thought his pupil was “playing it safe.” His student was not stretching himself, reaching his full potential (1).

Jesus doesn’t want us simply to “bear fruit.” Ah, that’s far too safe. **“Those who abide in me and I in them will bear *much* fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”** Not just fruit, but **“*much* fruit.”**

Michelangelo learned from experience. I’ve marveled at his talents and read Ross King’s intriguing study entitled Michelangelo and the Pope’s Ceiling. It tells the story of Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel. Now, Michelangelo’s preferred medium of art was marble. He saw himself primarily as a sculptor. The cantankerous Pope Julius II wanted Michelangelo to take on the job of painting the mammoth ceiling of his main chapel. It was as if the pope wrote across the artist’s talents that Latin word, “amplius”—that is, “larger.” The pope knew he could do better. Slowly, Michelangelo tackled that curved ceiling with so many challenges. He grew into the work, and it has become his stellar achievement in art.

Friends: Nowhere in today’s Gospel does Jesus tell us to **“bear fruit.”** *Eight* times, however, Jesus tells us to **“abide in**” him, that is, to live in him and let him be our life and energy (2). If we truly “abide in” him, *then* we shall bear **“much fruit.”** It’s a given. We’re well into this Easter season; and, at this stage, it’s as if the Risen Jesus counsels us that our spiritual canvass just might be too small. He challenges us at this point in our Easter celebration and paints in large letters over the canvass of our souls that Latin word “amplius,” that is, “larger.” Be bolder! Have chutzpa!

**“Abide in me, as I abide in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.”**

And, you know, it’s not a “Jesus-and-me” deal. It’s not simply you, a branch, and Jesus. No, each of us are branches on the single vine. We’re joined together, having been grafted onto the vine when each of us was baptized. St. Patrick’s, we’re joined—our hands holding one another—not simply when we pray the Lord’s Prayer. That symbolizes how we are branches on the single vine, and we’re called to be nurtured by the Risen Jesus. Together, then, we’re called to bear—no, not fruit, but **“*much* fruit.”**

Three weeks from today we celebrate the culmination of our Easter Season, Pentecost. It celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—not simply at the first Pentecost two thousand years ago…but now, as we heed Jesus promise that he **“does not ration his gift of the Spirit”** (John 3:34). This Pentecost, all through the church and outside on the walkways, we’re going to have a “Ministry Fair.” It’s each of our chance to plug into a ministry or two. Each of us depends on Jesus’ life within us just as much as a new bud of spring needs to get all its nurture from being part of the vine. Then, we—St. Patrick’s, together!—are called to bear **“*much* fruit”** and show this slice of God’s vineyard in the south of downtown that we truly are Jesus’ disciples.

Don’t play it safe. The Risen Jesus is writing across our souls: “Amplius,”—that is, larger, bolder!

1. See James Gilhooley, “Easter 5” (under May 3, 2015) @www.deaconsil.com.
2. Ibid.

***General Intercessions***

***April 29, 2018 5th Sunday of Easter***

**Make us, your church, ever mindful of the gift of our baptism, and let our vocation in Christ bear much fruit; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Prune your Church so that pettiness, bigotry and timidity may be cut off from our hearts; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Lead world leaders, and their citizens, to reduce—and eventually eliminate—nuclear weapons, as well as guns which inflict massive harm; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Inspire medical researchers and scientists in their efforts to cure cancer and other diseases—and for those who suffer from these illnesses; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Help us to treat immigrants and refugees with justice, fairness and compassion; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Raise up all who have died in hope, that they might share fully in the Easter victory, especially as we pray for John Francis *Hour*ican; we pray to you, O Lord—**