

5 Easter B

May 2, 2021

St. Patrick's

And Jesus teaches us again, **“I am the vine, you are the branches.”**

It is the strongest teaching in all the New Testament of the closeness of your relationship with Jesus, of my relationship with Jesus (1).

“Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”

Behind our church, on the second floor of the rectory where I live, my prayer chair looks out of a front window that gives a clear view of our bell tower and the large ginkgo tree next to it. I've become mesmerized by the cycle of that ginkgo tree. In the autumn the leaves turned a brilliant yellow. They were beautiful to enjoy. Then, with winter inching closer, I watched each morning how the leaves had slowly fallen to the ground. The last ones, clinging to the branches as the leaves swayed in the wind, clutching to the branch, until finally, one by one, they fell. Then, this past Ash Wednesday, with ten inches of snow on the ground, the naked branches of the tree glistened with ice which had covered them.

Slowly, with the new spring awakening, buds appeared on all the branches. Then, from the buds fresh, small leaves appeared. Each morning they grew larger. Now, the ginkgo tree has all its branches packed with fresh leaves.

“I am the vine, you are the branches.”

Indeed, you—I—are joined as branches on the vine, on the tree. It's something, St. Patrick's, we could never earn. No branch has earned its way onto the vine, or on that ginkgo tree. No small child ever earns her way into a family. And more: Not one of us ever earns our way into the heart of Jesus. He takes the initiative and invites us (2).

Friends: Nowhere in today's Gospel does Jesus tell us to **“bear fruit,”** that is, to live virtuously and do good stuff. *Eight* times, however, Jesus teaches us to **“abide in”** him, that is, to live in him and make our home in him as our life and energy (3). If we truly **“abide in”** him, then—*then!*—we *will* bear **“much fruit.”** It's a given.

Too often the church mistakenly does it all upside down. We priests hammer away at you to obey *all* the commandments, to act justly, to love every neighbor without exception. We scold you that you must be kind to all in your family, or at work.

Instead, Jesus teaches us, **“I am the vine, you are the branches.”**

We’re joined to him, as a branches on the vine, as those branches and leaves on that ginkgo tree. We’ll live virtuously because we draw our strength from him.

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.

We can depend on Jesus, day in and day out. Like those leaves on the trees, or grapes on the vine, we really *will* draw upon the Risen Lord’s goodness, and let it flow through us into the everyday stuff of our lives (4).

Then, we won’t bear just fruit. We’ll bear **“much fruit”** (John 15:8)!

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- (1) See *The Little White Book: Six-minute reflections on the weekday Gospels of Easter* (Saginaw: The Diocese of Saginaw, 2015), no page given (under “Wednesday, Fifth Week of Easter.”)
 - (2) Ibid.
 - (3) See James Gilhooley, “Easter 5” (under May 3, 2015) @www.deaconsil.com.
 - (4) Ibid., *The Little White Book*.

General Intercessions

May 2, 2021

5th Sunday of Easter

Make us, your church, ever mindful of the gift of our baptism, and let our closeness 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—

Bless all graduates with hope and boldness of spirit, that they might use their talents and gifts for the common good; 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 Norma Zal-a-mee-a, Elaine Himber, (*for the 11:00 a.m. Mass only--*) and for Brother Vincent Malham, on the 13th anniversary of his death; we pray to you, O Lord—