

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

Year B RCL

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; John 15:1-8

“Abide in me as I abide in you.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

In the gospels of the first three Sundays of the Easter Season, we heard of the apparitions of the Risen Lord. Last week on the Fourth Sunday of Easter Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” confirming the use of metaphorical images to define his relationship with the people.

The risen Lord is and will be always with the church, however, his presence is more than the physical body that the disciples knew. For this reason, the liturgy, takes us back to the gospel narrative of Jesus life to recognize how his sacrificial death and bodily resurrection is an eternal presence that finds its center on Easter. It is appropriate to say that each day is Easter, and each Sunday we have the weekly celebration of the resurrection to keep us alive.

Today Jesus continues explaining about his divine nature and uses other images from nature as well. We pass from the good shepherd to hear him say, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower." Similar to the I AM we heard in the Old Testament when God is revealing his nature to Moses and the people of Israel (Exodus 3:14), Jesus in declaring the I AM is showing the continuity of presence of the living God working through him. The mercy and presence of God never ceases.

When Jesus declares that he is the vine, he is using an image familiar to the people of Israel from the Old Testament that had been called the vine of the Lord many times. (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-8, 17:5-10, and 19:10-14, and Hosea 10:1). The difference here is that in directly saying that he is the vine, Jesus is pointing out that all new life passes through him. Jesus gives life to all the branches and without the interconnectedness and reply that belongs to Jesus, no fruit is produced.

The Father in his role as vine grower removes and prunes branches from Jesus to produce fruits. This work of the vine shows how the Father and the Son work together with the same purpose and dedication to produce fruits.

The Father in his capacity of vine grower shows how he knows when and where to trim, to prune, to cut, to edge, to remove for the fruit production.

The image of the branches that withers is also another image that requires attention. It is not about God anymore when people (branches) choose in freedom not to be attached to the vine. “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire.” This withering process takes time, but eventually it is the natural way how the life and freshness is diminishing away minute by minute until death.

Jesus, in mentioning today that we need to abide in him, is defining that human life without God is an illusion. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.” The fruitfulness in the Gospel comes from connection, that is, connection with God in Jesus Christ. Little fruit or plenty depends on and belongs only to him who says, “because apart from me you can do nothing.”

Abiding, remaining, and being together with Jesus is the only key each Christian needs in order to produce fruits. Eight times in today’s gospel Jesus uses “abide” as the relationship we need to have with him. This discourse

happens after he washed the disciples' feet and after the Last Supper when Jesus is saying goodbye to his friends before his arrest.

In asking them and us to abide in him, we need to understand that he is requiring actions of obedience and stillness that will produce fruits: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Only if we abide in him we are in communion with him, and if we keep with his words, the Risen Lord is a reality that produces disciples, and the Father is glorified. Amen.