

Fifth Sunday of Easter 2021

A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O'Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

Make your home in me

One of the saddest features of society today is the number of people who are homeless and sleeping rough. But another sort of homelessness is the plight of people who have lost all contact with God. The Gospel today (John 15:1-9) recalls one of the seven great "I am" statements in John's Gospel. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing." And Jesus invites us to make our home in him.

The Church is the community of Christian disciples called to bear fruit in his name, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Part of the sacrament of baptism is anointing with the oil of chrism. Jesus acquired the name Christ from the word for chrism. He is the anointed one and his followers are called Christians. But it is not enough to be Christian in name if we are not Christian in fact.

Stages of growth



Notice the three stages of growth: remaining in contact with the sap of energy; pruning; and bearing fruit. The invitation to remain in contact is so important that it is mentioned no fewer than ten times. The greatest way of maintaining contact is through reflection on the word of God. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it." Jesus invites us to be at home with him. "Make your home in me as I make mine in you." A house is a structure but it does not become a home until people live in it. Home is where you belong and where you are always welcome when you return. A

Christian is as much at home with Christ as a branch is with a tree. The life of a true disciple is rooted and grounded in Christ and always returns to Christ for meaning, sustenance and energy. "Apart from me you can do nothing". Cut off a branch from the plant and it withers. It is impossible to live a vibrant Christian life without a steady, daily life of prayer. In fact, the word *enthusiasm* comes from the Greek words for in-God.

Pruning

May is blossom time in the Northern Hemisphere and fruit picking time south of the equator. In between blossom and harvesting, many plants require pruning. Vines, just like tomatoes, require a lot of pruning. The creeping vine needs a severe pruning in spring, otherwise it will send out too many wild and fruitless tendrils and leaves. Later on, a month before vintage, a second pruning snips off the weaker fruits to let more sap available to swell out the stronger crop. We have to ask ourselves where do we need pruning. Where

do we need more self-discipline to find more time for our relationship with God ... for relationship with family ... for helping others? Where are we wasting the time and talents God gave us?

Spirit-filled evangelisers

The source of sap for growth in the Christian life is the Holy Spirit. In a world becoming increasingly secularistic, Pope Francis sees the need for Spirit-filled evangelisers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit, filling us with an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity. He wants to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelisation full of fervour, joy, generosity, boundless love and attraction.

Fruit hangs on fragile twigs

When we hear of our invitation to be active evangelisers our first reaction may be a sense of our inadequacy. It is important to remember that the sap of life comes up from strong roots and branches, but blossoms and fruit appear only on the fragile twigs and tendrils. History shows us that many of the people who bore great fruit in God's service were people who were conscious of their past failures. Moses had murdered a man. King David's moment of lust instigated a train of evil deeds. Paul persecuted the followers of Jesus but after his conversion he learned to smile at his own deficiencies. He saw how God deliberately chooses the weak and foolish of this world to confound the wise and strong, so that it might be plainly seen that whatever fruit is borne comes from God rather than human powers. So, whatever your own fears, trust in the Holy Spirit.

Towards a better liturgy

Here in Ireland, our churches are still closed for worship except for small crowds at weddings and funerals. However, it looks as though the strictures will be relaxed shortly and it is possible that full reopening will be allowed in the not-too-distant future. How many will return? It is likely that the number will be less than before. Many of those who came out of duty rather than reverence, arriving late and leaving before the last blessing, have lost their routine. While it would be sad if people no longer join in liturgy, yet it might not be altogether harmful. I hate saying this, but there is a dreadful minimalism here in Ireland holding back the development of good liturgy. It's like the story of the man who comes back from Mass on a Sunday morning. The wife asks him, "What did he preach about this morning?" And he answers, "About ten minutes". The watch was more important than the word. No problem with watching a television programme for hours, or a match that goes into extra-time, but Mass has to be quick. Returning after the pandemic will offer an opportunity to start afresh with a congregation who have come, not out of servile routine, but with a desire to hear the word of God and really celebrate the Eucharist. And miracle of miracles, will there be more people closer to the altar than to the back door! What an affirmation and support! It would make preaching a lot easier.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the vine, we are the branches. Apart from you we can do nothing. Grant us the grace to remain at home in you. Take away our fears and reluctance to get involved. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we may bear fruit and do our little part in making this a better world for all.