

5th Sunday of Easter, Cycle B: 5 May 2012

"I am the vine, you are the branches."

Today's Gospel passage from John is all about connectedness. It revolves about our connection with Jesus, but more emphatically it is that link between us and our Lord and our God. In using a botanical metaphor Jesus is stating an objective fact, a deep truth about who we are. As creatures, we are dependent upon God for everything because without God sustaining us, i.e. "holding us in being" to use philosophical language, we would cease to exist. Now as a hospital chaplain, I've had the opportunity to witness the "spark of life" leave the human body. As the soul is withdrawn to another form of being, we are left witnesses to a collection of chemicals that remaining within a carcass where only moments before there was a living human being, a person made in the image and likeness of God. And to speak of life without God is an impossibility, a contradiction. Whether we understand it or not or believe it or not really doesn't matter, we are objectively connected to God, just as the branch is connected to the vine.

Yet, there is always a subjective "piece of the puzzle" to living a life of faith. And that revolves around the things that we do and the choices that we make which allow God to grow within us. Even as we are "grafted" onto the vine; so to speak, the strength of that connection can change depending upon the choices that we make. When the connection is strong and there is a lot of surface area with the vine--- good things happen. It is then that God's goodness and life are able to flow freely into us. It is then that we are nourished, strengthened, comforted, as well as, inspired.

But as most of us realize, that connection can be influenced by those around us. While it's important to work on our bond to the vine privately--- in the silence of our hearts and the quiet of our rooms, we are also gifted by God with another aid it helping us remain affixed to the vine and that most valuable of gifts is quite simply--- the Church.

Yet, the role of the Church in the lives of the faithful is something that non-Catholics, as well as, unfortunately some Catholics have a problem with. And the reasons behind this discord are varied. Perhaps it was the way that we were exposed to the Church while we were young, perhaps some view it as a faith filled with so many do's and don'ts and some continue to attend Church but only because they feel an obligation to do so out of fear that something "bad" might happen.

And that's a shame because when we harbor those sorts of feelings we miss out on observing all of the blessings that flow our way through the actions and graces of the Church. Our Church is not meant to be a burden, it's meant to be a gift that helps us remain firmly attached to the vine.

Why? So that our Lord's life may continue to blossom within us and aid us into leading a lifestyle that is a faithful imitation of his. It is here, in Church, that we will hopefully capture some of those God filled moments through the sacraments, through the proclamation of Scripture, through devotions and communal prayer, as well as, the myriad of ministries that we can participate in. It is here in Church that we as Catholics hopefully will feel at home as we gather to give thanks for all the blessings that we have received.

Let us pray that we will always be confident in the connection that we make with our Creator, through his Church. Let us engage him through the instrument that he has given us, the Church, and draw forth from that experience a feeling of association and community that comforts us on our journey toward the gates of salvation.