

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 2nd May 2021 - 5th Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year B): 1st: Acts 9:26-31. Psalm 21. 2nd: 1 John 3:18-24.
Gospel: John 15:1-8.

Vines and vineyards are not much part of the Cornish or English scene, although times are a changing. We may well have visited wine growing countries. Much of Europe of course, and naturally the Holy Land.

In France, Germany, Italy, Spain, vast vineyards. The image of the vine or the vineyard is used frequently throughout the Old Testament for the Chosen People of Israel, particularly in Isaiah and Jeremiah, both prophets at the time of the Exile, and in one passage especially Jeremiah laments how this chosen vine had become a wild, degenerate plant.

Both the prophets and the Psalmist speak thus, but also of the love and tenderness of the vinedresser, God, of course. So today Jesus proclaims to be the True Vine, just as last week he identified himself as the Good Shepherd, in contrast to the bad pastors; now the true vine as opposed to the degenerate one.

Once again, St John has Jesus giving new meaning to some revered symbols of the Jews. As the true vine, Jesus is the fulfilment of all that was said about Israel being the chosen vineyard of God. The metaphor of the vine underscores Jesus' union with the disciples, and their absolute dependency on him for life and growth. It assumes because the vinedresser (*the Father*) seeks an abundant harvest, he trims back the vine stock (Jesus) to rid it of fruitless branches, and to invigorate other branches (disciples) to become even more fruitful.

When Jesus clothes himself with this imagery, he is stressing that Israel finds its life and vigour no longer in the Old Covenant but in the New Covenant ratified by its Messiah.

One of the features which adorned the Temple was a golden vine, and rich businessmen considered it a great honour to have contributed in gold to its extension. Those who have seen the Oberammergau Passion play may well remember the OT scene of a very large vine being carried on a pole and

forming a back drop to some scenes. Jesus, who had previously called himself the new Temple, destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days, now declares himself the true vine.

At every Mass we pray “through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you, fruit of the vine and work of human hands.” The intimate relationship between the Father and Jesus is then extended to his disciples ‘I am the vine, you are the branches’. This is an allegory, as distinct from a parable. In a parable only the main point is strictly intended for the application. But in an allegory all the details are applied. As the allegory of the vine is told, the disciples hear many aspects of Christ’s relationship with them.

This is part of the Last Supper discourses and the main themes are summed up here:

- although Jesus is about to depart physically, his work will continue;
- the disciples will be commissioned to carry on his work;
- they will receive divine energy or sap for the task.

The pruning of the vine is applied to life. A vine is a plant that grows rapidly and has to be pruned drastically if it is to bear fruit.

One type of pruning involves lopping off the shoots which will not bear fruit. The community of true believers are separate from those who have been cut off from Christ through unbelief.

Another type of pruning involves cutting back the branches which do bear fruit. This is more of a purifying or cleansing process. It reminds of the washing of the feet before the Last Supper. Jesus reminds them they have already been cleansed by means of his teaching, by the ‘words I have spoken to you.’

Remember what we do at the start of Mass: acknowledge our sins; being cleansed by his holy word.

When we remain in him, with his words in us. ‘You may ask what you will,’ our bidding prayers.

With all that we are sustained and nourished to go and bear fruit, fruits of the Spirit, as we move towards the outpouring at Pentecost, for the

Christian life is one of action, of growing, of producing fruit, to last into eternity, where we shall be at home in the Fathers house.

Covid may well prove to have been a pruning process, perhaps even a very severe one. What we know is we need to be part of the vine, linked in to Jesus if we are to bear fruit.

Livestream; zoom etc. have and do serve a useful and helpful purpose, but reality is we do need the sacraments: not just watching them. We need to be spiritually and physically fed by His Holy Word and his Body and Blood. As well as being the vine to which we belong, he is also the climate in which we grow and flourish.

Canon Philip Dyson