

Commentary on the Readings for April 28, 2024

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

In last Sunday's Readings (the 4th Sunday of Easter), we heard how Jesus presents Himself to His disciples as the "Good Shepherd" which is an easy way of describing a leader who is thoughtful, loving and protective. Today, the 5th Sunday of the Easter Season, we have another symbolic image of Jesus — that of a ***living, growing and nourishing vine***. Those of you who garden regularly will understand the meaning. For those of you who do not, our hope is that you will take the time to learn what this is all about.

The **First Reading** is from the ***Acts of the Apostles (9:26-31)***. Here we learn about an incident in the amazing life of Saul of Tarsus, later to become the great St. Paul. He was not one of the original apostles; rather, he was later drafted into that group by Jesus Himself. At first, the apostles were leery of him; but they soon learned how Jesus was to use him to "grow" the Church in the land of the Gentiles.

The **Responsorial Psalm** is **(22:26b-32)**. This Psalm is a continuation of the one that Jesus cries out from the cross that begins with those immortal words: ***"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*** Today we read or hear the second part of this Psalm, the victory over death. It is a reflection on the resurrection and an assurance that Jesus Christ is risen and still lives among us.

The **Second Reading** is from the ***First letter of John (1 John 3:18-24)***. The opening lines of this passage refer to the sincerity of a loving heart, not a romantic infatuation. If our heart or conscience is free of anxiety, then we will know that we love God and our neighbor in the way we were meant to (the ***greatest Commandment***). The last sentence of this passage speaks for itself. Read it again and see how it fits into the theme of the vine.

The **Gospel Reading** from ***John (15:1-8)*** is a great metaphor where Jesus compares Himself to a vine, perhaps a grape vine, where the harvest master, God the Father, prunes the branches in the winter preparing for the spring growth and the summer harvest. If we are truly disciples of Jesus, we won't mind this occasional pruning because it is for our own good. It is the new growth that produces the best grapes.

All of the readings for today are concerned with ***belonging, nourishment and appreciation***, something that we are all in need of. Life revolves around these needs and desires. Many people search high and low for them but do not find them. How sad because they are within our reach if we look in the right place, and that is in our own heart. These precious gifts are not ***"out there."*** They must come from within ourselves when, and only when, we are connected to the "vine," Jesus Himself. So you might give some thought to whether or not you are connected to Jesus and if not, why not? Something to think about during your prayer time this week! **MFB**