

**May 2, 2021**  
**5th Sunday of Easter**  
**John 15:1-8**

Jesus said to the disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.

2 He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.

3 You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. 4 Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

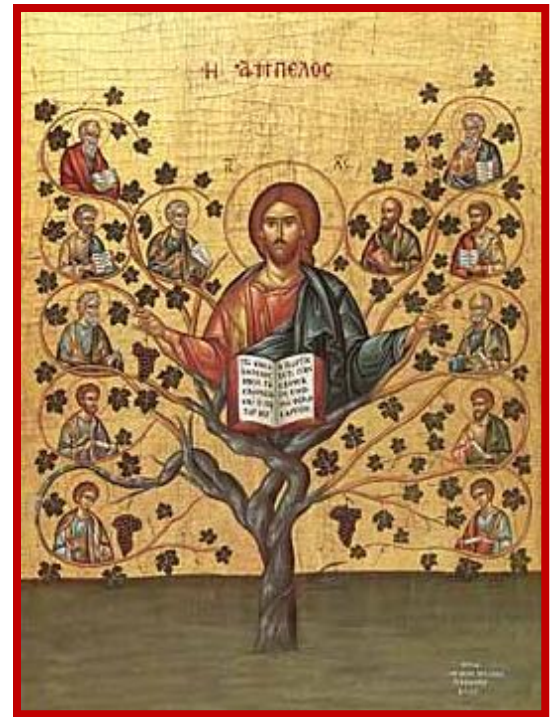
### **Background**

The image of God as the master gardener is familiar. Usually, Israel would have been represented as the vine through which individuals maintain their relationship with God.

"Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: Take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it." (Isaiah 5:1-7)

In the above text, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the vineyard that God has planted. But the vineyard has refused to bear good fruit. In the gospel text, John uses the image of a vine that carries life throughout the plant to teach the Christian community that it is through their relationship with Jesus Christ that they maintain their relationship with God. Another appealing aspect of this image is that it is difficult to tell where the grapevine's vine ends and the branches begin. Like with grapevines, the different branches spring out from each other and are twisted about each other. The text also emphasizes that the purpose of the plant is to produce a harvest. The nonbearing branches are pruned away from the plant so that new branches will grow that will produce a harvest. The branches cut off from the vine will die.

The vine becomes an image for the new Christian community that is dealing with diversity within itself. That diversity can cause some strain on their relationships with each other and the community itself. The new Christians came from Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They were Jews and Greeks. Among the first followers of Jesus were those, like Paul, who at first openly persecuted



Jesus and his followers. John uses the image of the vine to speak to this diverse group of people. The risen Christ gives each of them life and binds them together. To be cut off from the other branches is to be cut off from the life source itself.

A system of patronage was widely used at the time of Jesus. Normally people received the goods they needed through a system of trading. If this system failed to meet the needs of people, other sources would have to be developed.

People at the time of the Jesus would seek out someone with more influence to be his or her patron. If the patron accepted the responsibility, they would seek what was needed for the other. A patron had no expectation of repayment. Instead, the patron would receive abundant public praise from those that they sponsored. The public admiration that was inspired by others proclaiming one's generosity and compassion was highly valued by people of the day.

## Reflection Questions

1. What is your experience growing plants, and especially vinelike plants, like grapes?
2. Have the events of the last year and world challenges of Covid-19 made you aware of the diversity of people you rely on for your daily life?
3. How diverse is your family, your faith community, your work or social community?
4. Are you aware of how diversity has enhanced your life?
5. Are you also aware where diversity threatens your life?
6. Have you known people who felt they were not welcomed in your faith community? Do you also know the people who strive to make sure everyone is included and welcome?
7. Are there places in your life where you have needed to do some pruning?
8. The gospel talks about "bearing fruit" and remaining "attached to the vine." What is the difference?
9. Have there been times in your life when you put more emphasis on either bearing fruit or remaining attached? Did that emphasis come out of your own need at the time?
10. Can you take some time to talk with God about your desire to bear fruit, or how you are feeling about pruning some aspect of your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.  
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