

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 2, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Christ our Vine, we gather in your name so that we may grow in our understanding of and love for your Word, and bear fruit in your name. Prune and remove all sin doubt, and clutter from our lives. Help us, like St. Paul, to boldly proclaim our faith in you. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The Easter message of new life in the risen Christ continues in today's Gospel of the Vine and the Branches. Apart from Jesus the Vine, there can be no Spirit-life for his disciples. The letter to John reminds us to recognize Jesus as God's Son and to keep his commandments. The Spirit at work in Acts moves the recently converted Paul to present his message in Jerusalem regardless of the personal danger involved. Thus, the vine and branches constitute a living reality within the human soul and within a growing Church.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 9:26-31

This conversion story shows the marvelous transforming power of God's grace. It follows Paul's conversion story. Paul, the former *persecutor*, becomes a *proclaimer* and disciple of Jesus. When he returns to introduce himself to the Apostles, they are naturally fearful and suspicious of him. But Barnabas, Paul's "sponsor," encourages the Apostles to accept Paul. Then Paul immediately starts to preach about Jesus and his message. The Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) reject Paul and try to kill him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 22

These verses celebrate a sufferer's deliverance.

SECOND READING: 1John 3:18-24

Three theological themes are combined in a very significant way: *Christian love, confident belief and faithful obedience*. The first exhortation is to active love. It is not enough to proclaim love for God, but we must also love one another. And if in our efforts to love we fail and "our hearts condemn us," we ought not to worry because God's love and mercy "is greater than our hearts." In prayer, believers should go to God with utter confidence knowing that he will always bless us with what is best for us. Finally, the writer speaks about faithful obedience which involves two things: belief in the name of God's Son and love for one another.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 15:1-8

Last week, Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. This week he refers to himself as the *Vine* which gives divine life to all who believe in him and live according to his Word. Non-fruit-bearing branches will be cut away. This could be a reference to the Jews who reject Jesus or to people who do accept him but do not follow his ways. But even fruit-bearing believers will be pruned or purified by Jesus so that they can bear even more fruit. This daily pruning often involves dealing positively with our daily crosses and losses.

In the ‘vine and branch’ imagery, Jesus explains the wonderful intimacy that exists between him and his followers and the responsibility that goes with it. Believers who nurture their relationship with Jesus by lives of faith and love will bear much fruit. But then follows a severe warning: those who neglect their relationship with Christ will be cut away and thrown out. It is similar to what happens in close personal relationships: unless they are nurtured, they die.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Who has been a Barnabas in your life—in other words, who has been your primary inspiration and supporter in your efforts to become more Christ-like?
3. What *pruning* have you experienced? Who or what has been removed from your life that ended up bringing you closer to Jesus?
4. The vine and branches speak about the union between Christ and us. What helps you to have a greater awareness of this bond?
5. What fruit have you borne in your life that could not have happened without the presence of Jesus?
6. Name 1 thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Jesus, the deepest desire of my heart is to remain in you so you may act in me. Please help me to bear much fruit.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: This week try hard to live with a more conscious sense of the “divine in dwelling.”

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for Church and government leaders, especially in their decision-making.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

**PRAYER FOR HEALING
THE FAMILY TREE**

[Many families are cursed with the sins, wounds of their ancestors e.g., alcoholism, suicide, various physical and mental diseases. Hence, our need to pray for the healing of our Family Tree. Many individuals have through prayer been able to break the curse and heal wounds inflicted on their family.]

Heavenly Father, I come before you as your child, in need of your help.

Many of my problems have been caused by my own failure, neglect and sinfulness, for which I humbly beg your forgiveness.

I also ask you to forgive the sins of my ancestors whose failures have left their effects on me in the form of unwanted tendencies, behavior patterns and defects in body, mind and spirit.

Heal me, Lord, of all these disorders.

With your help I forgive all who have hurt me, especially living or dead members of my family tree, who have directly offended me or my loved ones in any way, or those whose sins have resulted in our present sufferings and disorders.

In the name of your divine Son, Jesus, and in the power of his Holy Spirit,

I ask you, Father, to deliver me and my entire family tree from the influence of the evil one.

Free all living and dead members of my family tree, including those in adoptive relationships, and those in extended family relationships, from every contaminating form of bondage. By your loving concern for us,

Heavenly Father, and by the shed blood of your precious son, Jesus,

I beg you to extend your blessing to me and to all my living and deceased relatives.

Heal every negative effect transmitted through all past generations, and prevent such negative effects in future generations of my family tree.

I symbolically place the cross of Jesus over the head of each person in my family tree, and between each generation;

I ask you to let the cleansing blood of Jesus purify the bloodlines in my family lineage.

Set your protective angels to encamp around us, and permit Archangel Raphael, the patron of healing, to administer your divine healing power to all of us, even in areas of genetic disability.

Give special power to our family members' guardian angels to heal, protect, guide and encourage each of us in all our needs. Let your healing power be released at this very moment, and let it continue as long as your sovereignty permits.

In our Family Tree, Lord, replace all bondage with a holy bonding in family love.

And let there be an ever-deeper bonding with you, Lord, by the Holy Spirit, to your son, Jesus.

Let the family of the Holy Trinity pervade our family with its tender, warm, loving presence, so that our family may recognize and manifest that love in all our relationships.

All of our unknown needs we include

with this petition that we pray in Jesus' precious Name. Amen

Rev. John H. Hampsch, CMF

From *Treasury of Prayers* by Father Eamon Tobin