

The Vineyard of the Lord

May 18, 2022
Homily for Wednesday Easter 5

I enjoy later summer trips through the Okanogan, especially turning down highway 93 just west of Sicamous and driving the stretch to Vernon. Along the way are fruit stores where all of the produce that is being harvested from the growing season is for sale. Then there are the hills resplendent with vineyards that produce that wonderful BC wine. One of the things that I appreciate about this area of BC is that although conducive to agriculture, it is naturally a desert and so intentional irrigation is required in order for its fruitfulness to be realized.

This is I think a fitting metaphor for the Christian life. Because we live in the environment of this world where Jesus said “the ruler of this world is coming”, aka the devil, the world is spiritually an arid landscape. The Church is therefore to be like an irrigated, and cultivated community akin to an Okanogan orchard or vineyard. It need attentive and constant care.

In this community we are joined to the vine, Jesus Christ, the Father is the gardener and we are the branches. What characterizes a community of vitality where spiritual growth is occurring? There are three things to consider.

- Sap and Life
- Pruning of Fruitfulness
- Fruitfulness of glorifying God

Sap and Life: The Catechism says, “The Holy Spirit is like the sap of the Father’s vine which bears much fruit on its branches (CCC 1108). What is sap? Simply put, it is the life’s blood of the plant. Sap flows through a plant to nourish it and bring new growth. It also helps protect and heal the plant. Our union with the vine, our life in Christ, requires the life of the Holy Spirit within us. This life is received in Baptism (CCC 1266) and increased and deepened in Confirmation (CCC 1303), as well as in our daily prayer, the sacraments of Holy Communion and Reconciliation, acts of charity and mercy, and all that makes up our Christian walk. Like the sap of a plant, the life of grace nourishes our union with God, helps us grow, and protects and heals us.

Pruning and Fruitfulness: As we abide in Christ and are nourished by the life of grace, we are meant to bear fruit. We are meant to give of ourselves to build up the Kingdom of Christ on Earth. Jesus said,

“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

We often think of this Scripture in terms of praying for priestly vocations, but all the Christian faithful, the baptized of every vocation and state in life, are called to labor for the Lord. Pruning spurs growth and fruitfulness. What is it we need to prune in our life to grow in union with the Lord and become more fruitful disciples?

Fruitfulness and Glorifying God: It is an essential element of a Christian life; all the Christian faithful are called to bear fruit. And Jesus said, “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” Our fruitfulness glorifies God. Speaking specifically about the laity, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity states,

“The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation, and the Church can never be without it. Sacred Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was at the very beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 11:19-21; 18:26; Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 4:3).”

In fact, this action of lay men and women in the life of the Church is so important that “for the most part, the apostolate of pastors cannot be fully effective without it (CCC 900, quoting Lumen Gentium 33). Our actions are meant to bring the light and life of Christ to the world and are essential to the mission of the Church. How do we choose to use the gifts and talents Jesus has given us to build the Kingdom and glorify the Father?

Here at St. Peter’s there is such opportunity for us to cultivate the fruitfulness Jesus teaches in today’s Gospel. Let us pray that in a world that is by nature spiritually arid, St Peter’s will be a fruitful community of supernatural grace and growth as the local expression of the vineyard of the Lord in this part of Calgary’s northwest.

Lord, we thank you that our lives matter in your plan of salvation. It is a gift to know that you trust us to be united with you in building your Kingdom. Lord, there are so many demands on our time. Help us to see how to prioritize our lives to serve you better. Help us see how we can best use the gifts and talents you have given us in your service. Fill us with zeal to build your Kingdom and with your love for each person we meet.