

Homily for 5th Sunday of Easter

Disciples of Jesus bear fruit for the Lord, fruit that is evident to other disciples. Disciples also imitate the Lord Jesus in His character, that is, His holiness, and in His ministry, that is in bringing others to the Lord. It's very understandable that the Jerusalem Christians did not believe that Saul of Tarsus, that is, the Apostle Paul, was a disciple. The only fruit from Saul that they had seen was fury, anger, and determined, far-reaching persecution. Some of the Jerusalem disciples possibly had loved ones who were martyred, partly through the persecution of Saul. Then Barnabas took [Saul] in charge and introduced him to the apostles. He explained to them how on his journey Saul had seen the Lord, Who had conversed with him. Barnabas' role was critically important. He had seen the mighty works for the Lord that Saul had done in Damascus. The Jerusalem Christians had not seen those works, but they did know and trust Barnabas, whom they had seen sell his property and donate the proceeds to the Church (Acts 4:37). Without Barnabas to vouch zealously for Saul, a great reconciliation might not have occurred. The gospel highlights the importance of what we identify ourselves with. Human beings are like vine branches; we need a vine in which to graft and root ourselves. The vine into which we are grafted and rooted conditions the way we see ourselves, the expectations we have of ourselves, and the ceiling of achievement we place on ourselves. So commit today to become ever greater disciples of Jesus Christ. God is glorified when we bear enduring, lasting fruit and become disciples of Jesus (Jn 15:8).

Business leaders understand well the concept of cutting activities out of the business process that are not profitable. Sports coaches and athletic trainers also understand cutting out practice drills and plays which are not productive. Farmers don't waste their limited time on activities which do not increase the yield of crops, flock, or herd. So, Jesus' teaching on pruning the branches which don't bear fruit is well understood by many. No trees would ever grow and bear fruits without proper care. *A prisoner in jail receives a letter from his wife: "Dear husband, I have decided to plant some lettuce in the back garden. When is the best time to plant them? The prisoner, knowing that the prison guards read all mail, replies in a letter: "Dear wife, whatever you do, do not touch the back garden. That is where I hid all the money." A week or so later, he receives another letter from his wife. Dear husband, you wouldn't believe what happened. Some men came with shovels to the house and dug up the back garden. The prisoner writes back: "Dear wife, now is the best time to plant the lettuce."*

What is not as well understood in our culture is the weakness of the human will without the strength of the Lord. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Rm 7:18). On our own, our endurance will eventually fade. Only by remaining in Jesus can we bear fruit for Him (Jn 15:4-5). Outside of Jesus, we will ultimately wither and fade (Jn 15:6). "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself," wrote George Bernard Shaw. To create ourselves we have to attach ourselves to Jesus, so that his life energy will flow into us. Today that word of wisdom is being addressed to us: that we should see ourselves in terms of our oneness with Christ just as the vine branch and the vine are one. Then and only then shall we be able to bear good fruit, the same type of fruit that Christ himself bears. Jesus couldn't make the message any clearer: A person either remains in Jesus or withers.