

## Homily for 5/2/21 – 5th Sunday of Easter

Today we hear Jesus say, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” In the Gospel According to Saint John, there are seven particular statements Our Lord makes in which He tells us about Himself by using an analogy. They are referred to as the “I am” statements.

“I am the light of the world.” (9:12, 9:5)

“I am the resurrection and the life.” (11:25)

Last week we heard –

“I am the good shepherd.” (10:11-14)

At the same time, He also says –

“I am the gate for the sheep.” (10:7)

At the Last Supper He says –

“I am the way, the truth and the life.” (14:6)

This summer we will hear –

“I am the bread of life.” (6:35-48)

And today –

“I am the vine.” (15:1-5)

All of these “I am” statements speak of Jesus being a source, a foundation, a spring from which something else flows, the power that enables everything else to happen. In these images, Christ makes it clear that He is the one we go to, and He is the one worth going to.

But – Each of these analogies reveal different details that Christ wants us to know about Himself.

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Word order is important in sentence structure – particularly in our languages of English and Spanish. I have never seen a bible translation where Jesus says, “The vine is me.” It is always written, “I am the vine.” Translators know that the meaning of the sentence changes depending which word is the subject and which is the object.

The words ‘am’ or ‘is’ are not the same as the ‘equal’ sign in mathematics. In math, “one plus one equals two” is the same thing as saying “two equals one plus one.” But to say “an even number is a whole number” – which is a correct

statement - does not work in the other direction. The statement “a whole number is an even number” is not correct. A whole number might instead be an odd number.

When Jesus says He is a vine and we are branches – He is saying nothing about a vine. Instead, He is using the image of a vine to inform us about Him and His relationship with us. He is saying our dependence on Him is like that of the branches to the vine. He points to a vine so that we can understand something about Christ.

I might discuss this in more detail this coming summer when we talk about the Bread of Life discourse over several weeks.

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Jesus says He is THE true vine; everything, and everyone, gets not just life, but true life and eternal life – from Him.

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In his gospel, John uses a limited vocabulary to weave a deep and nuanced theology. By themselves many of the sentences contradict each other. Taken together, they complement each other and describe an intelligent and beautiful message of love and hope.

For instance, Jesus speaks of His Father taking away every branch (meaning, every disciple) that does not bear fruit. But He also says that bearing much fruit is how one becomes a disciple.

In the same way, Christ declares two things.

One – that every branch that does not bear fruit will be taken away and burned – like the final judgement in other parables.

And Two – that the disciple is to remain in Him – suggesting the individual is the one who can remove himself from Christ the Vine.

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What are we to make of all of this? Well, there are many Lessons Our Lord is giving us in this image of the vine and branches. They include: that we need to remain with Him; that, even though it does not speak specifically about

**repentance, we need to return if we have left Him; that we are unified with Him, and so with each other; and that we need to be fruitful.**

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**Regarding repentance – the image of a vine reminds us of Saint Paul’s teaching in the eleventh chapter of his letter to the Romans. In Christ, gentiles have been grafted onto the plant that is the Jewish faith; that faith which is a relationship to the true God. When we sin we separate ourselves from the life-giving relationship with God in Christ. When we return to Him, we are reattached to Our life-blood.**

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**Regarding unity – If we remain in Christ we are also in union with all other branches that remain in Him. Just as Saint Paul speaks of us as members of Christ’s one body, so also all disciples who remain in Jesus are in union with each other. We stand and fall together. And since Christ speaks of Himself as only One Vine, that means we are also in union with all those who have gone before us who remain in Christ. So we pray for the dead. And we ask those in heaven to pray for us.**

**And as Christ, on the night before He died, prayed that we all might be one – we also must pray for unity. We must pray that all people be unified in Christ by Baptism, that all Christians become one Church again, and for unity among each of us.**

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**Finally, regarding fruitfulness - there are two main ways Our Lord speaks of glorifying the Father and bearing fruit.**

**The First is by doing good, loving neighbor and enemy, and caring for those in need.**

**The second is by sharing the faith, proclaiming the Gospel, and bringing others to Christ. We remember Christ’s parables of a small amount of seed producing a bountiful harvest.**

**Being fruitful is: sharing the gospel and living justly. It is proclaiming Christ by activity and by words. Or, as Saint John said at the beginning of our Second Reading today: love in deed and truth.**