

May 10, 2009

I wish to express my prayerful congratulations to all of the mothers in our diocese. On Mother's Day, it is especially appropriate for us to remember our mothers in prayer and to extend our love and appreciation to them for all they do every day of the year. May God give them the strength and courage to fulfill their noble vocation. Who better than our mothers, along with our dads, witness to God's self-giving love to us day in and day out?

The Gospel for this Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Easter, has special meaning for me. As I was entering the seventh grade, our parish school was built and I transferred to it. The very first homework assignment that Sister Eudisia gave us was to memorize this Gospel passage. Coming from the public school, we were not accustomed to homework nor to memorizing long passages. We very quickly developed habits of doing our homework well and on time and of memorizing too.

In the Gospel, Jesus used the allegory of the vine and the branches to express the depth of union He desires with His disciples. The union of the branches with the vine, and inevitably with the other branches, is an organic, deeply intimate one. It is a symbiosis, a "living with," an interpenetration. Jesus desires our union with Him to be as real and vital as the union of a branch with its life-giving vine.

Jesus describes Himself as the vine, and the Father as the vine grower who tends the branches and carefully prunes them. He says that we have already been pruned and are healthy, pulsing with life, because we listen to His Word and live by it.

St. Paul expresses our intimate union with Jesus this way: "I have been crucified with Christ and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:19-20).

The relationship and the communion between Jesus and ourselves is ongoing. Eight times in the eight verses of Sunday's Gospel, Jesus speaks about us remaining in Him. Our abiding in Christ makes our lives vigorously and abundantly fruitful just as the branch is fruitful as long as it is connected to the vine. "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:3-5).

Jesus tells us that if we remain united to Him and live by His Word, we can ask whatever we wish and it will be done for us. The Gospel passage concludes with Jesus saying: "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (Jn 15:8).

The allegory of the vine and the branches expresses, not only our union with God in Christ, but also our union with each other. There is no such thing as an "isolated Christian." Because of Baptism, we together have become the Body of Christ. Our union with Jesus and with each other is far deeper than that of members of a sports team who merely work together to accomplish victories.

By God's design, we are brothers and sisters of one another in and through Jesus. Together, we pulsate with the very same life, the life of Jesus. There are no strangers or "outsiders" in our Church. Only grave sin separates us from Christ and from one another.

Our lives as disciples of Jesus are dependent upon our ongoing relationship with Jesus and the Father and our relationship with one another. Our discipleship finds expression in the fruit we bear, the love of Jesus that we share with one another.

When we sing our “Alleluias” this Sunday, let us praise the Lord Jesus for drawing us into intimate communion with Himself and with one another and for enabling our lives to bear the fruit of love through the gift of His own Holy Spirit.