

Fifth Sunday of Easter



Prayer for Union

God our Creator,
who gives us the lush growth of spring,
and Jesus' image of the vine
and branches
to express our unity with you.
Help us enter into that oneness,
drawing our strength from you.
Help us breathe deeply
of fresh spring air,
and feel the sap of energy
flowing from you to us,
that we might better
serve you and each other.
We ask this through our Lord
Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

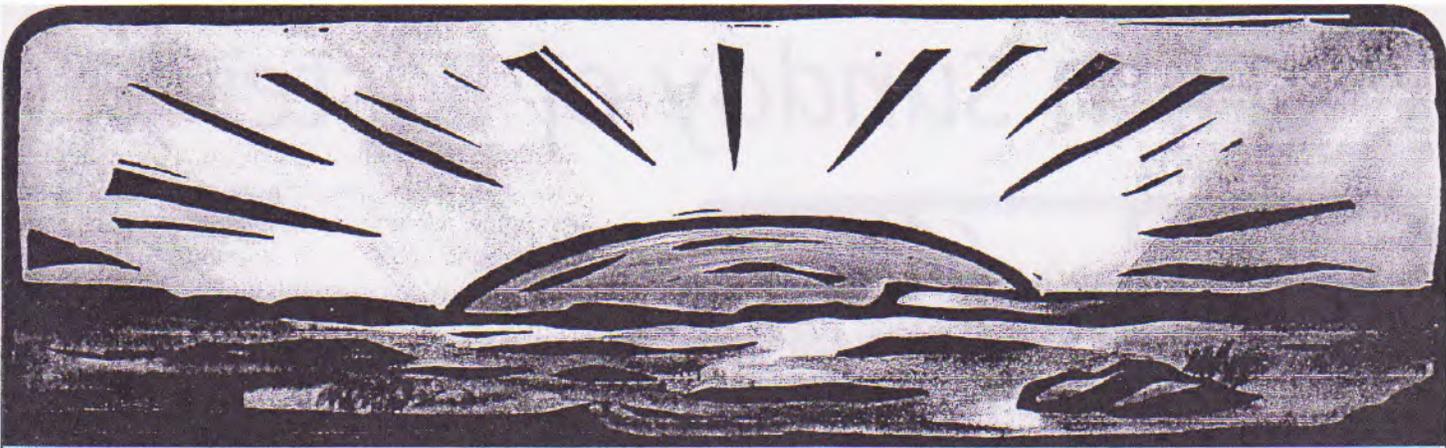
Sunday, May 6, 2012 The Vine and Its Branches

Acts 9:26–31; Psalm 22:26–27, 28, 30, 31–32 (26a); 1 John 3:18–24; John 15:1–8. It's impossible to see where the vine ends and the branch begins. They are one organic whole; so too our intimacy with Jesus. Scripture scholar Raymond Brown points out that Jesus' previous metaphors for receiving life involve external actions, such as drinking water or eating bread. This one is more internal: the branches simply soak up the life-giving sap of the vine. Jesus so kindly opens the doorway to intimacy with God. Is it hard to believe such good news? Would we find it easier to follow if something more difficult were asked?

The news might be too good to believe if we didn't have experience of it in ordinary human lives. Spouses or siblings who love each other live in an easy harmony, where each

one's voice is unique, important, and cherished, supporting the other's. Parents sacrifice for their children without thinking much about it, rarely patting themselves on the back. Long-married couples think instinctively of each other first, often putting personal needs in second place. This isn't neurotic codependency, but the unselfish love that reveals our truest identity.

The goal of the vineyard is to produce large and healthy grapes. If that entails pruning back lush growth, so be it. If a mom must rearrange her plans for a child, she usually does it unbegrudgingly. If a dad must work overtime to finance a special family need, he's often glad to do it. Where else in our experience this week can we find examples of the unity Jesus describes?



This Week at Home

Monday, May 7

An Advocate for Us

Today's Readings: Acts 14:5–18; Psalm 115:1–2, 3–4, 15–16 (1ab); John 14:21–26. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you everything” (14:26). Demetrius Dumm, OSB, suggests it is sometimes difficult to translate teachings from first-century Palestine to our own situation. Jesus didn't know from experience what it was like to live as an old person, a woman, or a computer technician. But the Holy Spirit helps us to follow Jesus' teaching even in circumstances very different than he could have imagined.

Tuesday, May 8

The Peace of Christ

Today's Readings: Acts 14:19–28; Psalm 145:10–11, 12–13ab, 21 (Alleluia); John 14:27–31a. In today's Gospel we read, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” Every time we offer the peace to each other at Mass, it is a challenge to put on Christ's mind and give a peace that is deeper and different than a merely cordial greeting. When have you received or given a peace that truly felt like Christ's peace?

Wednesday, May 9

Organic Image for Union

Today's Readings: Acts 15:1–6; Psalm 122:1–2, 3–4ab, 4cd–5 (Alleluia); John 15:1–8. Today we hear Sunday's Gospel again. Why the repetition? Perhaps the vine and branches image is so important that it should have a second hearing and root deep into our souls. Meditate on vines and branches this week—write about them in your journal or talk about them with a friend. What is your experience of connection with Christ and the Father through the vine?

Thursday, May 10

Saint Damien of Molokai (1840–1889)

Today's Readings: Acts 15:7–21; Psalm 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 10 (3); John 15:9–11. “Joy” seems like the last word to describe a leper colony, but all accounts indicate that joy came to Molokai under the leadership of Damien, the saint whose optional memorial we may celebrate today. When he arrived, six hundred residents were ostracized without medical care; morale was low. He secured government funding and led the creation of a bustling community with a new orphanage, school, church, and cottages. Although Damien died of leprosy, his story gives new meaning to Jesus' words: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (15:11).

Friday, May 11

Appreciating Friendship

Today's Readings: Acts 15:22–31; Psalm 57:8–9, 10 and 12 (10a); John 15:12–17. To appreciate today's Gospel reading, it's helpful to think of people who have been our friends, or whom we have befriended. Keep all the gifts of friendship in mind as Jesus says, “I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends” (15:15). What does it mean to have *Jesus* as a friend?

Saturday, May 12

Saints Nereus and Achilleus; Saint Pancras

Today's Readings: Acts 16:1–10; Psalm 100:1b–2, 3, 5 (2a); John 15:18–21. The story of Saints Nereus and Achilleus is veiled in legend, but we know at least that these Roman soldiers converted to Christianity and were martyred. They are buried in an ancient part of the catacomb of Domitilla, so scholars think they were among the earliest martyrs. Of Saint Pancras, we know only that he was martyred during Diocletian's reign, at the age of 14. Jesus might have foreseen these sacrifices when he said, “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you” (15:18).



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Keeping the Seasons

Reproducibles for Lent-Triduum-Easter 2012