5.5.21

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Read: John 15:1-8

In today's gospel (which was also last Sunday's gospel) we hear Jesus drawing a most revealing botanical parallel with our relationship with him: I am the vine, you are the branches. The possibility of great personal intimacy with Jesus is suggested by this simile.

There are several instances in the Old Testament where the people of God as a whole, Israel, are depicted as a vineyard, planted and tended by the Lord.  But now Jesus takes the imagery much further: he makes it very personal. His reference, in speaking to the disciples, is not just about a people belonging to and tenderly cared for by a benevolent (if slightly distant) land-owner God, but about the individual relationship between him and each one of us. He tells us that our relationship with him is like the fruit-bearing branches are to the vine; it is the sap rising from him that comes to each of us to maintain life - a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine.....cut off from me you can do nothing. The metaphor of the vine underscores Jesus' union with his disciples (us) and our absolute dependency on him for life and growth.

There is much evidence from the United States that most Catholics do not have (or, I would prefer to say, are not aware of having) a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ; for most it is a seemingly passive rather than active relationship - there may be regular church-going and reception of the sacraments, but the relationship is experienced (and only expected to be) one-way, from a donor God to a passive recipient.

Sherry Weddell wrote in 2012\*:

One of the most fundamental challenges facing our Church is [that] the majority of adult Catholics are not even certain that a personal relationship with God is possible. In short, statistical reality bears out this prophetic passage from Pope John Paul II [Catechesi Tradendae] that it is possible for baptised Catholics to be "still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe, placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit". The author goes on: The majority of Catholics.....do not know that an explicit, personal attachment to Christ.....is normative Catholicism as taught by the apostles and reiterated time and again by the popes, councils, and saints of the Church.

Any baptised Christian has to some degree a personal relationship with Jesus, but Jesus calls us to make it as personal (close and active) as the branch to the vine. From our own experience we know that the development of any meaningful relationship calls for expectancy, desire, time and some effort. We can be quite certain that none of those is lacking on the Lord's side: Make your home in me, as I make mine in you, and we shall bear fruit.

\*Forming Intentional Disciples - The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus - Sherry A. Weddell