

Read

Acts 9:26-31

Psalm 22:26-27, 28, 30,
31-32

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

LIVING THE WORD

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021



REFLECTION

Sometimes it is difficult to say “no” when something is clearly good and life-giving. If we are to truly grow as happy and healthy individuals, however, we must learn that we cannot possibly do everything we want to. This is the practical wisdom in today’s Gospel. It is easy for us to understand why the barren branches are removed from the tree, for they are not bearing fruit. We can probably even name the barren branches in our own life that we are working to remove. But the Gospel does not end there. Jesus notes that even the fruit-bearing branches must be pruned so that they can produce even more fruit. What are some of the fruitful branches in your life that Jesus might be calling you to prune so that you can grow?

ACTION

In the midst of your busy schedule, take ten minutes each day this week to do something just for you. Listen to music. Read a book. Go for a walk. Prune other things out of your life so that you can have some “you” time in order to bear more fruit and find God’s presence in your life.

🎵 *“Abide with Me”* — Matt Maher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GluC9-4aB7Q>



? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What pruning must you do in your own life?
- ❖ What are you asking Jesus to do in your life?



May 2, 2021

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #53B

Acts 9:26-31

Psalms 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus shares a metaphor in which he is the vine and we are the branches. God cultivates and nurtures us so that we can bear fruit just like the early Christians when they went out to spread the Good News. They bore fruit by helping others to believe in the Gospel. It is up to us to continue in this tradition and to look to Jesus for inspiration and strength as our true leader and Savior. When we remain in God, we bear much fruit in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Q FOCUS: *When we remain in Christ, we are continually nurtured by God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On May 3, we celebrate the feast of St. Philip and St. James, Apostles. We hear of St. Philip from the Gospel according to John, where he is one of the named Apostles in the story of the feeding of the five thousand. He also has several conversations with Jesus through that Gospel. St. James is mentioned less frequently in the New Testament. There were two Apostles named James; today's feast refers to James, the son of Alphaeus. There were also other disciples named James, so it is hard to distinguish which works are attributed to which James. Nevertheless, as one of the Twelve Apostles, this James was called by Jesus to follow, just as Philip was. These first disciples of Jesus show us what it means to leave everything and follow Christ.

Church Teaching Connection

"'Worship' itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the 'commandment' of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given" (*Deus caritas est*, 14).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 15:1-8

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them

and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

As we know from last week, Jesus uses metaphors multiple times to describe himself and God. Jesus also uses them to describe the relationship he has with his disciples and all who follow him, including us. In this Sunday's Gospel reading, we hear of the vine grower, the vine, branches, and fruit. These images help us to see the way our faith connects us to the Father, the Son, and the members of the Church. When we are rooted in the Spirit, we grow in faith and love and becoming closer to God. Through this, we bear fruit in the world.

► **Why do you think Jesus refers to God, the Father, as the vine grower?**

In addition to parables Jesus uses to describe himself and the Kingdom of God, there are many passages in the Bible that are full of descriptions of God. Father, potter, vine grower, rock, King, and even maternal images are used to describe God. In today's Gospel passage, we see God the Father as the ultimate nurturer who makes the soil rich, gives consistent water and sun and allows the fruit to flourish.

► **How does this make you feel, to know that God does all these things in your life?**

Jesus is the vine, the one from whom the branches (the disciples and all who follow Christ) come. Without the vine, there is no life in the branches. Without the Holy Spirit sustaining this life in us, we cannot bear fruit. Those who do not bear good fruit and do not remain in Jesus are cut from the vine and thrown into the fire. While this can be a scary vision of what happens if we don't follow Jesus, it is better to focus on the way those who remain in Jesus are treated.

► **Have you ever taken care of a plant? If so, what does it mean to prune something?**

Very often, plants will need to be pruned. This means cutting away some of the branches so that it can continue to grow. Pruning a plant helps to shape into the correct growth. In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that they have been pruned already. This can be seen in our lives. When we go through challenging times, but keep our faith in God, we come out stronger and grow closer to God. We don't have to be perfect; we just need to remain in Jesus. Through him, and the Spirit working in us, God the Father will help us to grow closer to him. Jesus assures the disciples—and us—that the Father is glorified through their devout faith. By our faith in Jesus, we remain part of the Body of Christ and have a share in the eternal life that Jesus offers us through his death and Resurrection.

► **How can we allow God to nurture us?**

► **How can we bear fruit?**

As followers of Jesus, we must pay attention to how God is calling us to live out our gifts for the Church. It can also be helpful to pray about the gifts of the Spirit in our lives. These gifts help us to remain in Christ when we practice them in our daily lives. They are wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear (or awe) of the Lord.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 180.

God is the cultivator, Jesus is the vine, and we are the fruit. What we produce matters to God.

The gifts we share reflect the "good" fruit of the vine. Each of us has gifts to share.

Our devotion to the faith will be rewarded abundantly in heaven.

Act on the Word

Vine, Branches, and Fruit

To understand more about the vine grower, vine, branches, and fruit metaphor, the teens will participate in a fun game that will help them to see how working together can bring about the Kingdom of God. This game is sometimes called "Electricity." Divide the teens into two teams. Line the teams up so they are facing one another. The members of each team hold hands, making one straight line for each team. Determine which end of the lines will be the start and which will be the finish. At the finish end of the line, place an object, like a ball or a set of keys. To begin the game, the catechist will flip a coin near the young people who are at the start end of each line. The two teens at the start will silently watch the coin. Without reacting or saying anything, they will squeeze the hand of person next to them when it lands heads up. The people whose hands were squeezed will then squeeze the hand of the person next to them. This continues down the line.

Once the person at the end of the line receives the squeeze, he or she grabs the object. Whichever team grabs the object first wins that round. If a team starts too early, the other team wins that round. Rotate the team so that each person gets to be the start of the squeeze and the object grabber. This activity is a metaphor for the visual we receive from Jesus in today's Gospel reading. The "electricity" created by the winning team allowed them to accomplish the goal. This is just like remaining in God and doing works because of the Spirit's movement in our lives. When we share our gifts with the community, we will help bring the glory of God to those around us. Spend a few minutes discussing these ideas with the young people and have them brainstorm ways they can remain connected to God in their daily lives.

Closing Prayer

*Lord Jesus,
you are the living vine, and we are the branches.
Help us to remain in you always,
just as you remain forever in your Church.
Prune from our hearts those things
that prevent us from following you in freedom.
You live and reign with the Father in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.