Fifth Sunday of Easter  April28, 2024

            Today’s Gospel applies the art and science of grafting fruit as an analogy of grafting to our spiritual lives.  Bear with me as I go off on a botanical tangent. Grafting is a type of vegetative procreation.  A scion, or branch to receive nourishment, is attached to a rootstock providing the nourishment.  The whole purpose of the grafting is to provide fruit.  Most, not all, but most grafting is done in orchards where dwarf or semi dwarf trees are planted very close to each other.  Grafting allows more fruit to be raised per unit of land, and higher quality of fruit.

     Jesus is not concerned with apples, pears or oranges.  But he is concerned with good fruit.  He wants His disciples to produce fruit for the Kingdom of God.

            So often our view of religion is as an individual relationship with God that exists as though it is in a vacuum. Yes, we acknowledge a connection with others and the formation of a community, but so often we see the community merely as a support for our individual relationship with God.  There is something crucial missing here.  Where is the fruit?

            The Lord wants us to build up the community by producing more and more Christians.  How can we increase the Christian population of the world, and ultimately, of heaven?  We can do that by remaining united to the life of Christ we received at our baptism, in which we were confirmed and by which we are nourished every time we receive the Eucharist.

            You might remember back in your science classes that different types of plants can be grafted onto each other.  So, one type of apple, say a branch from a Red Delicious apple tree can be grafted onto a Granny Smith apple tree. But according to what I read when I researched this, most often the rootstock, the tree that’s in the ground, will domineer the scion, the branch from the other tree.  Eventually, sometimes over the years, the fruit of the scion will change into the fruit of the rootstock.

            Jesus knew this when He said that if we are united to a vine which is not from the Lord, we will wither and be thrown out.  If alcohol, drugs, or other forms of materialism are the focus our lives, than we will produce the result of our allowing ourselves to be grafted onto death.  We will be self-centered and selfish.  Grafted onto death we will be dead, in spirit and, often in real life as well.

            We cannot fall into this pessimism. We Christians are the ultimate optimists.  We have a great reason to live.  And we live joyfully.   Our reason for life, our joy, is Jesus Christ.  Our goal in life is to produce fruit, His fruit, fruit for the Kingdom.

             The Lord places upon us the responsibility for the growth of the kingdom of God.  He uses us to call other people to himself.  At the end of our lives, we must stand before the Lord, showing him what we produced.  He is not going to be interested in our bank accounts, our homes, our athletic, intellectual, or artistic accomplishments.  He is going to count souls.   He's going to look to see if we did all we could to bring others to Him.  He is going to consider how well we loved.  Were our hearts so full of His sacrificial love that our children, whether they be our physical children or the children of others, the children of God, learned about the Love of the Lord from us?  Did other children of God, perhaps adults, see His Presence in us?  Jesus is going to look at people we don't even know who have been strengthened in their faith by seeing our faith.  What does the Lord want?  He wants us to bear fruit.

            How can we do this?  How can we be a source of God's presence for others?  The gospel says, "I am the vine, and you are the branches.  He who lives in me and I in him will produce fruit abundantly."  We are not just members of organized religion.  Our relationship with God is even deeper than mere confessing that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.  Jesus is not out there.  He is in here.  He lives in us.  We live in Him.  The good that we do, the virtue that we practice, flows from the life blood of Jesus Christ that is in our veins.

            If we want to do our best for Him, we need to stay united to the vine, united to Christ.  We need to have His Life flowing through us.  We received this life at baptism, but if we cut ourselves off from this life by ignoring the vine, by slacking off from our worship of God, then we will have no fruit to bring before God's throne.  It is not enough to say we are people of faith, to say we are Catholic.  We must practice our faith.  We must stay united to the vine.

            It is not easy business being a Christian, being a Catholic.  It means dedication, sacrifice, determination to live as Christ called us.  It demands having something to show for our lives.  But we can do this, and we will do this, as long as we are united to the Lord, to the vine whose life flows through us.

            We pray today that we might all have the spiritual courage to remain grafted onto Christ.