



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 29th April 2018 - The Fifth Sunday of Easter

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for 29th April 2018 (John 15:1-8): The True Vine

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away - he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples."

3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

A vine is an extraordinary plant. It can grow to a huge size, spreading over a wide area, a whole garden wall or trelliswork, from one single root, and producing a rich sap which yields grapes at the end of countless little branches. And then there is the business of pruning: cut it back thoroughly on all its many shoots and tendrils, and it seems only more determined to grow thick and strong. So the vine was the symbol of Israel, drawing from the Lord a sap which penetrated to all its shoots, and lovingly pruned by the gardener in a way which best encouraged its growth. The image was taken over by Jesus for his own community, the new Israel. Pairing with last week's picture of the good shepherd, it is one of the greatest of Jesus' images. It perfectly sums up the two emphases of this Sunday's other two readings. The only source of fruitful energy for the Christian is union with and dependence on the life flowing from Christ. Without that, the branches wither and die; a trimming cut off from a vine no longer has any chance of life. The vine itself at pruning season looks stark, rough and suffering. It is in fact bursting with new life.

What bits of your life need to be pruned away now? What more can you do to express the flow of Christ's life within you?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB



4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 29th April 2018



First Reading: *Paul's Fearless Proclamation*

Acts of the Apostles 9:26-31

When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple. Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to the apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to Saul and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. But after he had spoken to the Hellenists, and argued with them, they became determined to kill him. When the brothers knew, they took him to Caesarea, and sent him off from there to Tarsus. The churches throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria were now left in peace, building themselves up, living in the fear of the Lord, and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

This reading is the first news that we have had that the Church has spread beyond Jerusalem. Paul has received his vision of the Risen Christ and has joined the disciples, being baptised at Damascus. Then, according to his letters, he went off to Arabia for three years before going up to Jerusalem. Paul's arguing with the Hellenists (or Greeks) is a foretaste of his bringing the Gospel to those beyond the borders of Judaism. His fearless proclamation of the gospel message, both in Damascus and in Jerusalem, is a characteristic of the work undertaken by the early missionaries. We have already come across it when Peter preached the message before the Jewish authorities. It will continue throughout the Acts of the Apostles, even till the end, when we see Paul proclaiming the message during his captivity in Rome. How are we to spread the gospel fearlessly? Perhaps when we courageously uphold Christian principles in moral behaviour (such as the protection of life, the rights of the poor and disadvantaged), and fearlessly face the issues of justice, war and peace, and sexual morality. But our proclamation must also be made in love and charity.

What other thoughts do you have about how we should fearlessly spread the gospel?

Second Reading: *The Two Commandments*

1 John 3:18-24

My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active; only by this can we be certain that we are the children of the truth and be able to quieten our conscience in his presence, whatever accusations it may raise against us, because God is greater than our conscience and he knows everything. My dear people, if we cannot be condemned by our own conscience, we need not be afraid in God's presence, and whatever we ask him, we shall receive, because we keep his commandments and live the kind of life that he wants. His commandments are these: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as he told us to. Whoever keeps his commandments lives in God and God lives in him. We know that he lives in us by the Spirit that he has given us.

St John describes two commandments, and these will dominate the rest of the letter. They are not exactly the classic two commandments of the Law, reiterated by Jesus, to love God above all and our neighbour as ourselves. The two commandments of God here are firstly to believe in the power or name of the Risen Christ, and secondly to love one another. One might say that belief in the power of the Risen Christ is an application of love for God, an aspect which is especially relevant during Eastertide. The saving power of Christ flows out from God's care for us, and belief in it must both be a response in love within us and provoke love and gratitude. It must also make us fearless before God, full of the love which casts out fear, since the power of Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for us; it saves us from our own sin and disobedience, and also helps us face a hostile world with the fearlessness of which we heard in Paul's preaching in the first reading. It must also inspire fulfilment of the second commandment, love of neighbour. Such belief, issuing in love, is the basis of our understanding that the Spirit is dwelling within us.

What does it mean to say that we believe "in the power or name of the Risen Christ"? How does this help us to face our fears and anxieties?

“The saving power of Christ flows out from God's care for us.”

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