

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter B2024**

Let me start this homily by referring to an experience of life. We all, including myself, have done the experience of falling short in our commitments and pledges towards God and even our fellow human beings. We repeatedly fall in the same mistakes and sins with little success of getting rid of them. Sometimes, because of the discrepancy between our words and our acts, our hearts are broken. At times, we feel powerless and have remorse, for our conscience judges us for having failed.

For St John, if our conscience condemns us, we know that God is greater than our conscience and that he knows everything. Whenever we are conscious of having sinned, we may take confidence from our awareness of being of God. The omniscient God who knows us far better than ourselves is rich in mercy and truly forgives one who humbles before him. If, however, we are not conscious of having sinned, so much shall we be confident of God's favor towards us.

The goal St John is pursuing here is to keep us from despair when we have sinned. He wants that we rely on God and trust him in any matter happening in our lives. In truth, there is no question of letting us live in mediocrity, but of becoming better by relying on God's mercy and forgiveness. That is the reason why he says that the efficacy of our prayer depends on our fidelity to God, as we "keep his commandments and do what pleases him".

The commandments can be summarized in faith and in love of our brothers and sisters. Without keeping the commandments, there is no way of pleasing God. Our obedience to the commandments guarantees our continual communion with God. When we love, we testify to others that God is in us and we are in him, and his Spirit dwells in us. Then, we understand why John says, "Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deeds and truth".

That God is merciful and forgiving can be illustrated in the life of St Paul. He was the persecutor of the Church, but God forgave him and brought him to know Our Lord and the Gospel. The scene described in the first reading of today is about what happened to him after his conversion. Paul was integrated in the life of the Church by joining the group of the disciples thanks to the sponsorship of Barnabas.

The journey of Paul to Jerusalem teaches us some truths on the life of the Church. First, though faith is a personal commitment towards God, it is, however, a communitarian engagement. We cannot be Christian and be content with living our faith privately. Faith engages us before the community of our brothers and sisters with whom we share the same values of God's Kingdom.

That is the reason why Paul traveled to Jerusalem to show up himself before the apostles and give an account of his conversion. There cannot be faith separate from that professed by the whole Church. So it is strange to hear people say: "I believe in God but I do not join the Church; I pray in my home".

Second, by going to Jerusalem, Paul recognizes the authority of the Church symbolized by the leaders who were in Jerusalem. Even if the Lord has manifested himself to him in a personal way, Paul has understood that he belongs to the Church as a whole. Personal gifts and charisms received cannot be a reason to break from the mother church. There cannot be a reason to split from the Church or to contest the established leadership of those put in charge of the Church.

Finally, Paul's approach teaches us that in the Church we are complementary and not opponents or competitors. Each one has his story on how he came to know our Lord and to believe in him. Each one has his own charisms and gifts, but we are all at the service of our Lord. Jealousy and competition should not be the lot of Christians or of the ministers in the Church.

We should not forget, however, that it is when a Church is centered on our Lord that it grows under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The same is true for the life of every Christian. As our Lord states in today's Gospel, "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. (...) Without me you can do nothing".

This point is very important. Without a close relationship with our Lord, we are lost. Without a community of life with our Lord, we are nothing. Our Lord is the source of all good works any Christian can do.

The image of the vine and branches means that our life is essentially that of bearing fruit. However, there is a condition for that, namely to be united with our Lord, like a branch which remains attached to the trunk of the tree in order to produce fruit. So, our Lord is the vine trunk and we are the branches. If we do not remain united with our Lord, we will become dried branches that can no longer produce fruit.

Dried branches represent those among us who are Christians only by name, and all those whose names are still in the parish records, but who no longer live the teachings of Jesus' Gospel.

When our Lord says that the dried branches will be thrown out and put into fire, he is warning us of the danger of remaining without life. He is also inviting us to strive to improve our relationship with him so that we come to produce abundant fruit. The reason for that is very simple: when we produce good and abundant fruit, the Father is glorified. When we are truly and sincerely united with him, any prayer we present to the Father is answered.

May we come throughout this week to work on our relationship with our Lord! May God bless us in all our efforts to become better and better! May God bless you!

**Acts 9: 26-31; 1 John 3: 18-24; John 15: 1-8**



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