E5B 2024 SFTC

Jesus paints a beautiful picture in our Gospel today - the vine grower, the vine and the branches. This theme appears several times in the Old Testament as well. The vine or the vineyard representing the People of Israel, or the vine representing Lady Wisdom. There’s also a connection between the vine and the coming of

the Son of Man.

But Jesus uses the image in a new way: “I am the true vine…you are the branches.” He is the fulfillment of all the prophets, all the hopes of the People of God. Not just His teaching, but He Himself: Emmanuel--God with us. Not only that, but we, as His branches, are intimately connected to Him and to His mission.

That’s how completely God wants to be with us - as closely united as a vine to it’s own branches.

Let’s unpack this a little bit. If we are like branches growing from the vine of Christ, then our life and our strength come from our connection with Him. A branch has no life on it’s own, it only has life through the vine.

That means a life of prayer, sacraments and good works - the ways by which Jesus taught us to stay connected.

There is a major difference between a vine and the Kingdom of God: in nature, a branch cannot cut itself off from the vine, but we can. God does not cut us off, we do it ourself whenever we turn away from our Source of Life.

But Jesus does tell us that there will need to be some pruning of the branches.

We need to weed out some things from our lives…those actions or attitudes that ‘choke off’ God’s grace.

Only then will we continue to grow and bear fruit.

There’s another important lesson for us in this image of the vine and branches: our connection with each other. As branches on the vine of Christ, we have a sacred bond with each other through Him. Jesus was so concerned with the unity of His followers that He made it one of the last prayers He offered before returning to the Father:

“I pray, Father, that they may be one, just as you and I are one.” Then He gives a reason for this prayer:

 “that the world may know that you sent me.”

Our unity helps teach the world that Jesus is who He claims to be. It’s that important! We need to be very careful about causing any division in the Body of Christ. I learned one of my favorite hymns at vacation bible school when I was a kid: “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Not by our bank account, not by our knowledge of scripture, but by our love for one another.

Our 2nd reading describes the type of love we’re talking about. “Let us love in deed and in truth, and not merely talk about it…this is the way of knowing we are at peace with God.” So, we can judge our relationship with God by the way we treat each other, by the way we “love in deed and in truth.”

I had a wonderful Spiritual Director who passed away several years ago, Fr. Bill McCuen.

One of the things he always asked about was relationships… How are you dealing with people?

When I find myself being impatient or critical, it usually means my prayer life needs some attention.

When little things seem to get under my skin, it usually means I have to do some pruning in my heart.

“I am the vine…you are the branches.”

How can we ‘grow’ our relationship with Christ, who is our vine? And with each other, who are the branches?

May we grow together in love, so we can bear the fruit that the world so greatly needs.