

5th Sunday of Easter (B)

28th April 2024

'Vine and Eucharist'

Acts 9: Saul preaches fearlessly 1Jn 3: Our love is to be something real and active.
Jn 15:1–8: *I am the vine, you are the branches ...*

Eastertide, as we have been discovering — both on Sundays and on weekdays — is rich with the beautiful texts of St John's Gospel, and the images that St John gives us throughout his unique Gospel are many and varied. Time and time again Our Blessed Lord uses that phrase, in John's Gospel, "*I Am.*" This quite deliberately echoes the sacred name of God revealed to Moses hundreds of years before, at the Burning Bush in the wilderness, "*YHWH, I Am who Am.*" But attached to that "*I Am*" in St John's Gospel are often descriptions that elaborate on who Jesus is. "*I Am the Light of the World,*" "*I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life,*" "*I Am the Bread of Life,*" "*I Am the Gate of the Sheepfold.*" Last week we had part of Jn10 on Jesus's self-description, "*I Am the Good Shepherd,*" and this Sunday we hear another: "*I Am the True Vine.*" What it's important for us to notice is that all these images relate not just to Jesus in Himself, closed in on Himself, as it were, but they are *relational*, they show how He *relates to us*, His Holy People.

This Sunday's image in particular speaks of His intimate union with us: the Vine is one, stem and branches in one living being, just as Christ incorporates us into one being with Him through Baptism. We become, as the Church, "*one body, one spirit, in Christ.*" We are not Our Lord's people as underlings or subjects; He treats us instead as family, as intimates. He unites Himself with us, such that we live by His very life, as He makes abundantly clear with His words: "*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.*" This is a communion of life and love that no-one could have imagined before Christ Himself appeared. No-one in Old Testament times could have dared suppose that such a union of God with humanity would come about, or even be present in the mind of God. And yet this was *precisely* the plan that the Almighty Father wished to effect: to unite mankind so closely to Himself, that we become one with Him, live one life, with one grace, His gift of the Spirit.

For me, this image of the whole Christ, as Vine and branches — Christ Jesus the Head or Stem, and we the body

of the Vine — is made all the more rich when one folds into this image the reality of the Holy Eucharist. If we live as the branches of the one Vine, by Jesus's own life, then we do so by the *sap*, as it were, the 'life-blood' of that holy Vine, which is the sacred food of Jesus. To be one with Jesus, and living His life, means to be nourished perpetually by the Precious Blood of the Body of Christ, pumped out into the Vine, His members, by that eternal Sacred Heart. We live in Jesus by feeding on His own holy, divine, life given us in Holy Communion. So much of the Easter message points towards the union of Jesus's people with His risen body in the Eucharist. Several of the Easter Gospel accounts of His appearances make reference explicitly, or implicitly, to His *feeding* the disciples. And as we continue in Eastertide we are reminded that our perfect union with His Resurrection life is in His feeding us with His Risen Body and Blood.

"Cut off from Me, you can do nothing," Jesus says: so let's not do anything that cuts us off from His life-blood; let's not separate ourselves from that life-giving food and drink that maintains our unity in the Body of Jesus. And if you do find yourself cut off through serious sin, then make a

habit of coming back quickly to Him through Confession, rather than leaving it for weeks or months cut off from Holy Communion; I don't think that that's what Jesus would want; He would want you reconciled sooner, rather than later; don't 'punish yourself,' so to speak. As we make this reflection today on 'remaining in the Vine' by the power of Jesus's sacred Body & Blood, I would like to point you towards several things that can re-ignite our love for His life-giving presence in the Holy Eucharist.

The 1st is simply a reminder that a special part of our provision for prayer time here at Newman House is the quiet **Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament**. Especially at this time of year, when you feel the pressure of exams and deadlines, just a little while in the divine presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar could be exactly what you need to find some calm and prayerful headspace: Sunday 6–7pm; Tuesday 6–9pm; alternate Thursdays 7.30–8.30pm. If quiet Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament isn't something that you are yet accustomed to, then just try it out gently: come for a short while, just 5 mins, perhaps, and the likelihood is that it will grow on you, and

you'll soon find yourself wanting to spend longer.

The 2nd is that not far from here — 15 mins' walk, maybe — is the **stunning church of *Corpus Christi***, Maiden Lane, just off Covent Garden; it was beautifully restored, and then solemnly re-dedicated by Cardinal Vincent 6 years ago in order to be the diocesan shrine of the Blessed Sacrament. It's a church I love to go in to when I am just having a walk, like I did the other day; to go in and seek the solace that Our Lord's presence in the Tabernacle always provides. It also has the relic of Bl. Carlo Acutis, a young saint of this 21st c. of ours who was himself utterly dedicated as a teenager to the adoration of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. I suggest that if you've never found that church of *Corpus Christi*, you make an occasional visit. In fact, a worthwhile Catholic practice to get in to the habit of is never to pass a Catholic Church without popping in for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, even if it's for 5 mins. This expresses our faith that Jesus is there — Jesus is *here!* Jesus is awaiting our presence, and our prayer, even if it is, necessarily, sometimes brief. We can unite ourselves with Him, spiritually, even in a short moment of trusting prayer!

The 3rd thing is that, in about 5 weeks' time when we get towards the end of the academic year, we'll have the feast of *Corpus Christi* — 2 wks after Pentecost, 2nd June — and we'll keep that by having a ***Blessed Sacrament Procession*** after that morning's Mass, round the streets and back here to Newman House, so that's something to look forward to — a very public statement of our love for Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist — to round off the year.

“*Cut off from Me, you can do nothing,*” Jesus says. Let's allow this intimate union of the Easter mystery with the ‘sacred mysteries’ of Jesus's Eucharistic self-gift to reinforce in our hearts this message: that allowing the precious life-blood of His to course through our veins, we become more and more the sort of holy people He would want us to be; His branches, reaching out in freshness and vitality, living His life in the world. His Body & Blood should make us His Body the Church; and as His living Body, the Church, we must draw into this intimate, happy, fruitful unity with Jesus many others. “*It is to the glory of God that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be My disciples*”!