

Fifth Sunday of Easter  
April 29, 2018  
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## Reflection

As the Easter season proceeds, spring is beginning to make itself known. The final flurries of snow should soon be a memory as real warmth arrives. Spring came late, but the sap is flowing and flowers are rising. Lawns are turning from cold yellow to verdant green. Yellow and green. The colours remind us of the tragedy in Saskatchewan, where 16 died and 13 were injured. The outpouring of support filled the news; not just here but across the world. And then came the tragedy in Toronto: 10 dead and 13 injured; carnage from hate, not misfortune. But light drives out darkness. Humboldt's triumph of love prevailed over terror in Toronto. This love comes from somewhere. It comes from God, because "God is love (1 Jn 4:8)."

In today's Gospel, Jesus says "I am the vine, you are the branches." The love of God comes to us because he loved us first. He sent us his Son so that man could see the face of love. Jesus gave his life for us out of love, so that he could send us his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the love that flows between the Father and the Son. This divine love enters into us like sap into a branch, especially through the Eucharist. Why? Because we are united to Christ: all by flesh, some by choice; joined to him as friends, joined to him as brothers. The love of God is what makes us and it becomes part of us. This love, which is the Holy Spirit, dwells within us from baptism. St Basil lists the effects: "Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise and led back to the Kingdom of heaven. We are adopted as children, and given confidence to call God "Father".

Acts 9:26-31  
Ps 22  
1 Jn 3:18-24  
Jn 15:1-8

We share in the grace of Christ, are called children of light, and are given a share in eternal glory (736)."

When Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches," he was referring to a grape vine. In a way, the point of a grape vine is the grape; the fruit. We eat the grapes, turn them into wine, and can even plant the seeds...but normally we just spit them into the garbage. Jesus says, "Whoever abides in me and I in them bears much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." This fruit is the holiness of life. Our life is made fruitful by union with Christ. Here's what happens when we believe in Jesus with trust, when we accept the sacraments that he gives us, when we keep his commandment to love God and neighbour: Jesus within us loves the Father and his brothers, through the power of his Spirit (2074).

Today is the Fifth Sunday of Easter, but April 29 is the Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena. She is a doctor of the Church, and lived in the 1300s, but only to the age of 33. She was a stigmatic who bore the wounds of Christ, and a woman of action who brought the pope back to Rome from Avignon. She was also a mystic who wrote her dialogue with God in a trance of ecstasy. She was concerned about the sins within herself, the Church, and the world. The "Treatise of Divine Providence" records what God revealed to her.

First, why is love even necessary? God in his power could have created the earth to be a paradise where each has all he needs. "I could easily have created men possessed of all that they should need both for body and soul, but I wish that one should have need of the other, and that they should be my ministers to administer the graces and the gifts that they have received from me (30)." God allows suffering; he gives us needs - so that we can care for each other.

Second, isn't it better to focus on the love of God, ahead of love of neighbour? "Love of me and of her neighbour are one and the same thing, and, so far as the soul loves me, she loves her neighbor, because love towards him issues from me (29)." Love cannot be divided, since it comes from God who is one. Love remains one, since it flows back to him who is one. Love only grows, since its source and destination are depths without end. It is by loving our neighbour - his creation - that we are able to love God.

Third, is there any profit to love? "Inasmuch as you can do me no profit, you should do it to your neighbour (29)." God is immutable; he cannot be changed; he IS through all eternity. But we, his creation, we do need the love that he gives us through others. It changes us into what he intends us to be.

And so it is necessary to love those who suffer, like the folks in Humboldt and Toronto. And God's love is not limited to the victims. In his mercy, it extended to Paul who breathed threats and murder in Jerusalem; it extends to Alek Minassian who killed those people in Toronto. God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us that those in mortal sin are swayed by false pleasures: lust and anger; envy, greed and fame. But their conscience bites them through reason.

They also get the fruit of the Holy Spirit, diminished by their capacity to receive it, reduced perhaps by our failure to pray for it; but sometimes looming large in their hunger: we know that conversions do happen. "The fruit that I destine for them, constrained by the prayers of My servants, is that I give them light, and that I wake up in them the hound of conscience, and make them smell the odor of virtue, and take delight in the conversation of My servants (24)." The fruits received by those who abide in Christ allow us to plant seeds in those who don't. These seeds sprout in God's good time, so their branches too can be pruned and cleansed, all for the glory of God.