

The Fifth Sunday of Easter (2018)

John 15:1–8 [Jesus said:] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for *apart from me you can do nothing*. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

In the Name of Jesus.

“apart from me you can do nothing”

Notice my sermon notes? What else do we say, when our Lord says to us ‘Apart from ME y’all can do NOTHING!’—what else do we say than Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen!

There is no one more DOWN-TO-EARTH than the One Who is NOT from this earth, yet now made of the same earth as we are! This discourse on Him/the Vine and US/the Branches is all about our Life until He appears again to give us Life with Pardon for good!

And with the Incarnate language He loves to use—sheep and shepherd, door and entering, water and thirsting, bread and hungering, and so on—He cannot make a more INTIMATE connection with us—outside the WOMB!—than speaking of us as branches that GROW and LIVE from the

Vine, the Source.

And there are TWO ‘takings away!’ One, when we’re shriveled up and dead and so useless we’re only good for burning. The other, when we are **ABOUNDING** with good fruit—and the Father prunes it off, so that we bear more, live more, shout Hallelujah **MORE!**

And so we thank God the Holy Spirit from our New Birth from above, the washing with the water and the Spirit’s Word: Our Baptism into Christ! For the **SPIRIT** is just as clever as the **SON!** And **HE** knows that the world and its prince and our own wicked insides can even take the pledges of gift and blessing and turn them all into whatever **WE** can sink our claws and fangs into!

As a summary, I like to call such Christianity ‘annoying!’ It’s a nice, simple ‘sniff test.’ In love, let us never argue with anyone claiming to be a disciple of Jesus. But when we ask them about what it means to be such, and they do not answer **HIS** gifts, but rather **THEIR** grabbing onto Him somehow—when you hear that annoying language, let’s not deny anyone’s Christianity. But let us pray the Spirit of Jesus that **WE** do not turn so useless and annoying. In other words, let us pray to Him that He remove from us all **FEAR!**

For, you see, **MOSES** taught same! ‘Apart from **ME, MOSES,** you can do nothing!’ It is clear from Moses’ **LAW** that if we would enter **LIFE,** there is only **ONE WAY:** obedience to Moses’ **LAW!** And Moses ain’t joking! Any more than the Holy God jokes about His will!

But when Christ came in our flesh, He revealed to us, to the world, that the Branches of the Vine **DO** what Moses could only demand, but could not **GIVE!** This means:

repentance

And faith

And true good deeds

And the pruning—the suffering—the opposition—the world—the darkness—the dead, who ain't getting any deader!

And rising to Life with The Blessed Trinity that cannot end!

Notice, from the Acts reading today, that when the Ethiopian eunuch had heard from Philip all about the Crucifixion of Jesus and His rising, the man IMMEDIATELY started to look for water TO...BE...BAPTIZED! Even THIS pastor can understand what that FIRST pastor of the church did! Reveal all that Christ has gained by His suffering and rising—and then DELIVER all of it by the simplest of all gifts, which is nearly IMPOSSIBLE to turn into something WE DO!

And yet, some turn it into that.

My sweetheart darling is applying to teach at area Christian schools. And one nice group told her that they hire all sorts of Christians, WITHOUT regard to denomination! And they would be GLAD to consider her! After receiving her resume, they were EXCITED to talk to her about possibilities; and then they asked her to send in a personal statement of her faith.

And so, my better half began by saying, “My life in Christ began when I was so small, and my parents brought me to new life and the saving waters of Holy Baptism!” And then, she went on about her faith, and loving others, and keeping the commandments, and confessing sins and encouraging children.

And the next we heard about it was—‘We’re sorry; the POSITION...HAS...BEEN...FILLED!’

Now, Lord only knows what happened there. But MY experience is that although people CLAIM to be open to ALL denominations—that means all those that instill so much fear and anxiety in children of God, that they somehow think that BABIES produce their PARENTS, rather than the other way around.

Our Vine, Our Lord, rescues us from all of that, my dear fellow BRANCHES!

Parents birth their children, without checking with them first.

Our Father above has begotten US, without checking in with us first!

And, yes, as we live and grow in Him, by His Word, by His Spirit, our God Himself tells us that WE do great deeds, produce bountiful fruit!

And to save us EVEN from our Christianity, Our Vine writes large over all our lives: apart from ME y'all can do NOTHING!

So that even when we learn to rise in the morning seeking heaven's will, not our own comforts and desires, THAT comes from above, even if it comes from INSIDE!

And when our blind eyes open wide to the fear and trembling of those around us, who break the LAW because no one has assured them that God is their Loving Father—and who think so little of the GOSPEL, because other voices tell them that what the VINE does is NOTHING apart from the great work of the branches—

And when we can do good deeds and thank the Farmer our Father for pruning them away, and making us make no big deal out of any trust in the Gospel OR works of the Law—

Then His Word lives in US! Apart from ME y'all can do nothing!

We're expecting our first grandchild. Pray for Jessica up in Utah.

And the first thing I shout out to Laura when Jessica calls is 'How are we FEELING today?!' And when I hear, 'Pretty nauseous!', I shout a Hallelujah and thank God and smile. For like her mother, our daughter seems to be created to pour everything about HER into the child who has NOTHING to do with the whole procedure, except to receive. Even when it makes poor mommy queasy.

Our Lord went way beyond queasy, my dear ones, when He laid down His Life to make us His friends.

So when you worry about your standing with God, ponder the Passion of your Lord, and speak to your fellow redeemed of His rising again.

And when you cannot find the energy inside to do good, to keep the Law, the spread the Gospel, remember the reason: apart from ME you can do nothing! 'Oh! I was trying to take charge of my deeds, my fruit, my Life! But Jesus has worked so hard and got sick to death to take over who I am!'

And when your love withers up dry and you find yourself useless, the water of your Baptism is still living and good enough to make you live again.

And when you turn into an annoying Christian, for the love of God and for the sake of the rest of the world, I beg you to repeat to yourself over and over the pledge the Vine makes the Branches so that they bear HIS fruit:

apart from ME you can do NOTHING! Hallelujah!

From each chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John, a pledge and guarantee from the Spirit of Jesus to His disciples. ALL these, our Vine gives us to make us His fruitful branches:

We are born of God

We DO believe in Him

We ARE born from above, utterly NEW

Y'all drink the water of Life, that you never thirst again

You and I DO honor the Son and His Father

We EAT the Bread of Life and live forever

Rivers of living water flow from US

We walk in the LIGHT

We confess ourselves blind and yet we SEE

Y'all ARE the sheep of the Good Shepherd

You believe in Him, so, though you die, yet you shall live. You live and believe in Him, and so you can never die!

We SERVE Him and we FOLLOW Him—where HE is, we are also

We are His own, Whom He loves to the end

We see the Father when we see Him

You and I are His friends

His Holy Spirit has come to us so that we never fall away

In the world we have tribulation; but HE has overcome the world; and we may take heart!

We HAVE eternal life, WE, for whom Christ prays

He, our King, has made us His Kingdom

EVERYTHING that needs to wrap up between our God and us has been FINISHED

His Father is our Father, His God is OUR God

And we His lambs, whom He tends and feeds and shepherds:

Because WE say so? Ha! THAT is the language of FEAR! THAT just makes us ANNOYING Christians, if we are Christians at all!

Because HE is the Vine and WE are the branches

Because apart from HIM we can do nothing

ALL those pledges and guarantees from the Gospel according to Saint John are OURS—and MORE!—because

WE have been baptized at the authority, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!