

Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 2, 2021

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

During these weeks following our celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord, much of the attention in God's communication with us in the Scriptures has been directed at how God relates to us, and how we relate to God in response. An important understanding we need to have about our religion, our faith, is that God is not distant or remote or aloof from us. Rather, God seeks to be a close part of our lives. In Jesus Christ, God assumed our human nature, became a human being like each of us. In the sacrament that is the Church, and in the sacraments of the Church, God's presence becomes part of our lives, our very lives.

It is in light of this that we can hear Jesus make use of the image of the vine and the branches. If we graft ourselves to the Lord and to his love and his teaching, as a branch can be grafted to a limb or a trunk, we will be energized by his presence in our lives. If we prune away from ourselves what is dead and stifles growth, then we can develop a bountiful result.

But it is not that simple as the story of Paul's interaction with the early Christians demonstrate. The story that is told is a very human a very human account. In a way, it is almost humorous. Paul is enthused with his new found faith but he encounters those who knew Jesus and they were skeptical. He then goes among his own people, the Hellenists, those who were more

affected by the influence of Greek thinking, and live in other parts of the Roman empire. Even these people wanted to kill him because they did not share his enthusiasm.

To the ideal imagery of the union with God depicted in the vine and the branches and the account and the harsh reality encountered by Paul's new-found faith is added the encouragement found in the letter of John. We are to realize that it is in both our words and our actions that we are to reflect our Faith. No matter what challenge or opposition we might confront, whether from others or even from ourselves in the form of questions or doubts or temptations, we need to be convinced of the truth of the relationship we seek with God.

In our lives, the relationship we have with God is reflected in the relationships we have with others. As we know, such relationships are not always simple but more often they are complex. We must be convinced of the value of such relationships and work to make them succeed. So it is with respect to the relationship with God. The branch must be alive itself in order to receive vigor and strength from the trunk.

It is this bond with the loving-kindness, justice, mercy and peace that is to be revealed to the world. It is what calls us to make known in our lives our faith and trust in our good and gracious God.