



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of May, 2012

by Terry A . Modica



5th Sunday of Easter

May 6, 2012

Read:

Acts 9:26-31

Ps 22:26-27-28,30-32

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1



Reflect:

As we see in the Gospel reading, all of us who belong to Christ are fruit-bearing branches of one vine. Jesus is the vine, and because we are all attached to him, we share the same calling: to bear good fruit. And not just any fruit that seems good, but the same fruit that Jesus produced.

However, most of us underestimate how important this is! Stop underestimating how necessary it is for YOU to produce Christ's fruit – and more of it – today. Today too many Christians are settling for mediocrity. As long as we get some personal satisfaction from being Christian, we feel all too easily satisfied. As long as we're helping some people with our kindness or generosity or love, we think God is satisfied with the good fruits we're producing.

Have you ever asked why there's so much evil in the world? Why doesn't God raise his almighty hand against war, against corruption in government, against the greed of high-salaried managers who lay off their employees while giving themselves huge bonuses, against the perpetrators of physical and emotional abuse, against legislation that discriminates against Christian faith, against rising crime rates, or against any evil that's corrupting our world?

Why doesn't God do something?

Actually, *he does!* However, he does it the same way he grows grapes. The life-force of the vine (Jesus) travels through the vine to the little twigs (you and me and all Christians) that hold the grapes. The more open we are to receiving nourishment from Christ, the more fruit Jesus produces through us. But the grapes are not supposed to stay there!

We're nourished by Christ in order to take his fruits abundantly out into the world. We must grow strong and healthy, branch out, and use everything we've received from Christ for the sake of others.

Evil is stopped to the extent that we Christians continue Christ's earthly ministry. Victory over evil comes from Christ, that is, *through* us from Christ. Holiness in the world comes from Christ's Holy Spirit actively transforming it through our holiness.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Are you doing everything you can to grow the best grapes on your branch of Christ's vine?

† How healthy is your connection to Christ? What in your life needs to be pruned off because it's not producing full, abundant fruit?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name some of the things we do that fertilize the vineyard. What has helped your branch grow stronger and bear more fruit?

† How does ignoring the need to prune ourselves hinder the growth of good fruit – evil-defeating good fruit?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

6th Sunday of Easter

May 13, 2012

Read:

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Ps 98:1-4

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17



Reflect:

Servanthood is the mark of true Christian living. Jesus emphasized it during the Last Supper, saying that he came not to be served, but to serve, and that likewise we should serve one another. In his parables, he often referred to believers as "servants" of the Kingdom. But in the Gospel reading, Jesus says that he wants us to be his *friends*, not his slaves. Is he contradicting himself?

Not at all! Friends serve because they care. Slaves serve because of duty and the fear of punishment.

Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love." Do we hear this as a friend or as a slave?

Slaves are afraid of what will happen if they fail to keep God's commandments; they are self-protective. Friends are eager to find out what God commands, because they view the commandments from the perspective of love, as opportunities to serve; they are other-oriented.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment: Love one another the way I love you." It's the supreme commandment; call it the Commandment of Friendship. He says, "You know how I love you, my friends: I openly share with you everything that the Father tells me." His friends realize that what he shares (through scripture *and* through the Church) reveals our opportunities to love. *Every* commandment is rooted in love. *Every* Church teaching is based on scriptures that help us know when and how to love.

When we fail to obey, do we lose God's love? Never! Do we lose our place in his love? Yes. By living outside of his commandments, we feel unloved even while being loved.

This is slavery. We're enslaved by fear or false beliefs or by our wounds that have caused us to think that we're not loved enough. God's commandments then feel confining, and if we try to escape, we commit rebellion. Those who don't rebel accept their slavery and obey dutifully in the hope of winning God's love.

Friends, on the other hand, know that God always loves them, and in this love, they're free to serve one another joyfully.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Are you obeying God like a slave or his best friend?

† Do you eagerly and happily jump into doing the will of God or do you complain about it? Do you ever want to escape from God's will?

† What will you do this week to become more aware of his friendship?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What raises our relationships with God from slavery into friendship?

† Describe the differences between obeying out of duty and obeying out of love.

† How do you define friendship with God?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Ascension of the Lord

May 17, 2012

Read:

Acts 1:1-11

Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

Ephesians 1:17-23 or 4:1-13

Mark 16:15-20



Reflect:

Sometimes we find ourselves in the same posture as the disciples in Acts 1:1-11, looking up at the sky where we last saw Jesus, not moving, just staring at nothing, waiting for him to come back and do something to rescue this world from its evil.

Our world needs the Second Coming of Christ — now! What's the delay? Ahhh, but he's told us not to wait but to go forth and spread the Good News. He told us to take what he's given us and use it to continue the works of his ministry.

Why do we stare at the empty sky? Because we feel inadequate.

Parents know this feeling. After giving birth or adopting a child, we have the awesome task of raising this person into a faith-filled, emotionally healthy adult.

Graduates know this feeling. After completing college or a Lay Ministry training program or ordination or final vows, we stand on the threshold of working for the Lord and wonder: Will I be effective and successful? Will I like it? Or will I be sent where I'd rather not go?

Those who are grieving know this feeling. After a loved one is taken home to the Lord or a friend is lost in a failed relationship, our lives change drastically. It feels like it shouldn't have. How can we recover from the emptiness, which by its very nature forces our attention onto ourselves and our unmet needs, so that we become full of service to others?

Every change in our lives is a commissioning. Every loss is the beginning of a new calling. Every experi-

ence is training for a work of God's kingdom that the Lord wants to accomplish through us.

Why are you standing there looking at the sky? Although you cannot see what he's doing now, he has not abandoned you. He is fulfilling his promise: "You will receive power from the Holy Spirit, and you will be my witness throughout the earth." Indeed, you were

given that Holy Spirit in baptism, and it is this Spirit of God that empowers you to continue the ministry of Jesus using your particular talents and experiences.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What thresholds or new beginnings are you facing?

† How are these opportunities for the continuation of the ministry of Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† In what ways are you doing the works of Jesus?

† Which parish ministries could use your gifts and talents?

† How do you rely on the Holy Spirit to get it done?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

7th Sunday of Easter

May 20, 2012

Read:

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

Ps 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20

1 John 4:11-16

John 17:11b-19



Reflect:

What makes us one with our brothers and sisters of the faith, i.e., people who love and follow the same Lord, Jesus Christ?

We can have many differences and still have unity. We can have conflicts among the people who serve God in parish staffs and ministries, and still have unity. We can disagree with the non-Catholic beliefs of our Protestant kin and still have Christian unity.

Jesus prayed for this unity, as we see in next Sunday's Gospel reading. Are we the answer to his prayer? Or are we working against him?

Being one in the Lord does not require getting rid of everything that divides us from each other. Rather, it comes from recognizing that we stand on common ground as we worship Christ, no matter how differently we worship him. The spirit of unity is the appreciation of what we have in common. It's the recognition that we are individually members of the same body and that we need each other so that the Body of Christ on earth functions well.

Being one in the Lord Jesus means being different than the rest of the world. Our unity comes from belonging to the kingdom of God rather than to the kingdom of darkness and evil. And this unity is strengthened by purging ourselves of sin – individually and as a body.

Jesus said to the Father, "I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world."

All those who love, follow, and serve Jesus, regard-

less of their denominational affiliations, are all members of the same family, the Holy Family. We live together on the same side of the cross, which is resurrection and eternal life.

However, when we allow ourselves to sin, thinking as the world thinks, with prejudices and judgmentalism and condemnation toward other Christians, we divide ourselves not only from our brothers and sisters but also from God's kingdom of love. We break the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Do you see yourself as united with or divided from those in your parish who worship differently than you?

† What about Christians of other denominations? Who else do you feel spiritually divided from?

† Ask Jesus to repeat his prayer for unity but to focus it, this time, on you.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What are some of the ways that you've come to recognize your unity with other members of the Body of Christ, despite obvious differences?

† What does "unity" mean to you? How is this lived in your home or your parish?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Pentecost Sunday

May 27, 2012

Read:

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104:1,24,29-31,34

1 Cor 12:3b-7,12-13 or Galatians 5:16-25

John 20:19-23 or John 15:26-27;16:12-15



Jesus commanded, "Go into all the world and preach the good news." Use my gifts and talents to make a difference. I have my own expectations about what I should and should not do. I now sur-

render to You my ideas, my limitations, my preferences, and my goals. I want to be useful to You. I want to go where You lead me. Holy Spirit, send me forth gifted and empowered to spread the holy and victorious love of Jesus Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit; renew me. Amen!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Does the Holy Spirit seem like a Person to you, as real as Jesus? Why or why not?

† What affect does the "Prayer to the Holy Spirit" (above) have on you? What in it is most helpful to your spiritual growth?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do you know when the Holy Spirit is being manifested in you? Give an example from your life.

† How did this experience help you grow in holiness?

Reflect:

The Holy Spirit is Christ's Spirit generously given to us so that we can be holy and to continue the ministry that Christ began. On our own, we cannot be like Jesus, but if his Spirit is alive and active within us, we have Christ's holiness, his faith, his supernatural love and peace, confidence and endurance, and everything else that we see in Jesus.

You received the Holy Spirit during your baptism. The reality of this was confirmed and strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Ever since the first out-pouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, God has been transforming the world by working through those who serve his Kingdom. He generously fills us with his Spirit so that we will succeed at whatever he asks us to do. But how well his holiness and power exudes from us is up to us.

Join me in this Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Dear Jesus, stir up within me the fullness of Your Holy Spirit. Help me to live in Your holy power. Open my mind to understand Your truths, and open my heart to accept Your truths even before I gain right understanding.

O Holy Spirit, help me to seek, more than anything, the kingdom of God. Help me to recognize what I am attached to that is not of You, and give me the determination and the strength to let go. I want only You.

O Holy Spirit, help me to face my sinfulness and to feel genuine sorrow for the damage that I have caused. Comfort me as I mourn my need for forgiveness, and give me Your spirit of rejoicing over this new growth. Then, help me to share this healing mercy with all those around me.

Comments/Prayer Requests: