

Pastor's Column

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To Remain With Jesus

“In last Sunday’s liturgy, a passage from the Gospel of John was used which was dominated by the expression: ‘I am the good shepherd.’ A parallel statement is used this Sunday as Jesus proclaims: ‘I am the true vine.’

Jesus continues to speak to his disciples through imagery which they readily understood from their everyday experience, and with symbols which come from Jewish religious tradition. The language of shepherd came from the pastoral practice of Israel, but it also had links with the Jewish idea of a King Messiah. The vine is also a staple part of Israel’s agricultural life. It carries within it the idea of life which flows into the branches of a spreading plant, and the fruit which depend upon that life in the branches. But it also summons up memories from Israel’s religious past, a symbol for Israel and for peace and prosperity.

But we must be careful not to focus our attention too sharply on the image; this can lead us to lose the message. There are two parts of the argument. There is Jesus’ claim to be the giver of life, the fulfillment of all that was best in Israel, its ultimate hope for peace and prosperity, but there is also the demand that the disciple ‘remain with’ Jesus. He uses this expression no less than six times. Of course, it is because Jesus claims to be not only the vine, but ‘the true’ vine, that the latter demand is so urgent.

Jesus is the source of life, peace and prosperity for all who would be his disciples. But, as always through the Gospel, Jesus admits that behind his life-giving presence is a Father. Like a vine-dresser, the Father must cut away those who claim to have their life in and through Jesus, but whose fruits deny the values of Jesus and his Father. We have already been formed in our Christian lives by Jesus’ word. We have been prepared to bear fruit, but even in this situation we are unable to set out on our own. As Jesus, the vine, only exists to make the Father known, so must it also be with the Christian disciple. We pray so often ‘thy kingdom come, thy will be done,’ but often it is our own kingdom and our own will that we seek.

No matter how well we have been ‘pruned already by means of the word,’ we must remain intimately linked to Jesus. We must not set off on our own mission. The person of Jesus must be our model and our inspiration. He is the vine. Without him our skills turn in upon ourselves, we wither, die, and must be thrown away. Fruitfulness in spreading God’s kingdom depends upon our accepting the word of Jesus and then allowing it to be nourished by our continued contact with him in our sacramental life, our Christian community and in our intimacy with him through prayer.

To remain in Jesus means to be his disciples. In this way we are associated with the fulfillment of all that Israel promised. Now we have the possibility of the full possession of the Spirit, rendering glory to God as we work for his kingdom, rather than our own.”

—Rev. Francis J. Molony,
The Gospel of the Lord—Year B

F. Mike