

Commentary for the 5th Sunday of Easter - B -



Fifth Sunday of Easter: Being with God

The Smithson Family lives in a home like yours in a town like ours. And like every family, there are special times when the whole family gets together. This really means a lot to Kate and Bill Smithson. They are in their 50's, both working, but their four children have begun their own lives. Two, Frank and Anne, are married and both have children. The other two, Sam and Jean are in the “still looking” faze of life. Bill and Kate just love it when they have their children and now their grandchildren all together for a dinner, or just to chat for awhile.

Of course, they have gotten used to the fact that Jean is never there. For reasons they don't completely understand, Jean wants nothing to do with her parents or siblings. They haven't seen her in three years. She is completely alienated from the family. Phone calls to her are answered tersely or messages on her answering machine are ignored. Kate and Bill have asked her repeatedly why she wants nothing to do with them, but she just says, “I'm too busy.” They still love her. She's their daughter. But she is not there, never there with them.

You could say: they are with her, but she refuses to be with them.

This same thing happens in so many of our lives. Many of you have children or know of children who have just absented themselves from their families. This alienation can also happen in our relationship with God. God is with us. He even proclaims at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, “Know that I am with you always.” In the Old Testament God proclaims that a day will come when He will be the people’s God and they will be His People. All of us know that God wants to be One with us. But that is not good enough. He may be with us, but the relationship suffers or even ceases to exist if we are not with Him.

“I am the vine, you are the branches,” the Lord says in today’s Gospel. Remain in me as I remain in you. The Lord is like Kate and Bill Smithson loving His children, always caring for them. But sometimes, too often, we are like Jean. He is with us, but we alienate ourselves from Him.

Perhaps all of us have come upon people who live immoral lives, refuse to worship and then say, “I know God loves me. I’ll be OK.” Insufficient. It is not enough for us to say, “God loves me,” we have to be united to the vine for His Love to flow into us. We have to want to be related to God.

This is what Jesus is speaking about in the Gospel. Knowing where the vine is does not allow the branches to be nourished by the life of the vine. The branches must be part of the vine, grafted onto the vine. God loves us infinitely more than Bill and Kate love their daughter Jean. But like Jean, if we refuse to enter into our Father’s love then we will not have his life flowing through us.

The Gospel goes on to speak about bearing fruit. If the branch is united to the vine, it bears much fruit. If the branch is not united to the vine, the branch will wither and die and there will be no fruit. God calls us to make His message real in the world. He calls us to be witnesses of the Resurrection. He calls us to bring His Love to the world. He is not calling us just to be in His presence. He is calling us to transform the world with His Presence. Husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and friends, priests and laity, all are called to live the Life that matters so completely that others are attracted to that Life. The Life of Christ is a magnet. When people experience this Life in others they want it for themselves. These people, those who turn to God, are fruit. Our union with God draws them to Him. They are the fruit we have been called to bear.

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” We come to

Church to praise God, to worship God, but if this is all we do, reverence His Presence here, and then return to a pagan world living immersed in pagan values, we are not really worshiping God. We are only worshiping God when we take what we experience here out there, to a world that longs for His Presence. We gather so we may be nourished. We are nourished so we may be sent to others. Gathered, nourished and sent. Those are the actions of a Eucharistic People.

When we live our Christianity in our workplace, at our schools, in our neighborhoods, others experience the Word of God that is within us. And the very Power of God will work through us in ways beyond our understanding, for that is Who God is, the One who is beyond our understanding.

God is with us, yes. But to have a relationship with God, we need to be with Him too. When we do this, when we are united to the vine, then we can do the work of the Christian. We can draw others to Him. We can bear fruit.

Fr Joseph Pellegrino SJ