

Root Yourself in Christ

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

Many of us are familiar with the sad American Indian story about a young man who found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a prairie chicken. The eaglet hatched with the brood of prairie chickens and grew up with them. All its life, the misplaced eagle thought it was a prairie chicken and did only what the prairie chickens did. It scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. And it flew no more than a few feet off the ground with a thrashing of wings like other prairie chickens. Years passed and the unfortunate eagle grew very old. One day, it saw a magnificent bird high above in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared gracefully on its strong golden wings. "What a beautiful bird!" said the unfortunate eagle to its neighbor. "That's an eagle, the chief of the birds," the neighbor replied, "But don't give it a second thought. You could never like him." So the poor eagle never gave it a second thought and it died thinking it was a prairie chicken.

The frightening story underlies the importance of what we identify ourselves with. Human beings are like vine branches; we need a vine in which to graft and root ourselves. The vine into which we are grafted and rooted in turn conditions the way we see ourselves, the expectations we have of ourselves, and the ceiling of achievement we place on ourselves. Vines come in many shapes and colors each soliciting our primary allegiance. They come in the form of nationalism such as Nazism, ideology such as communism, and religion such as the cults. Materialism, pleasure and power are among the most popular vines of our times. Once we identify ourselves with a false vine, it immediately conditions and determines how we see ourselves and what we do with our lives.

The Jews whom Jesus was addressing in today's gospel knew very well the vine on which they were supposed to be grafted and rooted. Many times in the Old Testament the religious and national entity Israel was referred to as the vine (Psalm 80:8, Isaiah 5:7; Hosea 10:1) which the hand of God had planted (Psalm 80:15; Jer 2:21). The Maccabees even minted a coin in

which a vine was used to represent Israel. So when Jesus claimed that he was now the vine they would understand that as an invitation to shift their primary allegiance from Jewish nationalism to the person and message of Christ. To make sure they get it Jesus makes the claim that he is not just the vine but the *true* vine. The word "true" (in Greek *alethinos*) here signifies that which is real, authentic and valid, as opposed to that which is flawed, imperfect or false. To accept Jesus as the true vine into which our lives are grafted and rooted is to regard every human ideology or institution which recommends itself to us as an object of primary allegiance as flawed, imperfect or false.

The misguided eagle in our story was like a branch grafted on a false or imperfect vine. That is why it remained false or imperfect all its life. If a wise bird had told it the truth about itself it would have shifted its self-identification from prairie chicken to eagle. This radical shift in self-understanding would then enable it to produce in its life the marvelous feats for which eagles are known. Today that word of wisdom is being addressed to us: to stop identifying ourselves primarily in terms of nation, social or economic status, race, or even religious affiliation. Rather we should see ourselves in terms of our oneness with Christ just as the vine branch and the vine are one. Then and only then shall we be able to bear good fruit, the same type of fruit that Christ himself bears.

We know the pathetic story of Cardinal Wolsey who, under King Henry VIII of England, gave his primary allegiance to the state rather than to God. On his deathbed he left us these words of wisdom: "If I had served God as diligently as I have done the king, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs." His life was like that of the unfortunate eagle in the story. The gospel invites us today to know better: to graft and root ourselves as vine branches in to the true vine, Jesus Christ.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 9: 26-31

1 John 3: 18-24

John 15: 1-8

May 6, 2012

靈 修 生 活

復 活 期 第 五 主 日

林 森 執 事

今天讀經的主題——就是「住在基督內」。讀經二是若望為我們說明愛德是需要行為與事實上表現出來的。我們對天主的信德，必須在生活裡付諸實行。信而實行，才是活信德，活信德引人入天國。如何信而實行呢？聖若望宗徒很瞭解耶穌這個教訓的重要性。他在他的書信上，說：「誰遵守天主的命令，就住在天主內。天主也住在他內。」為此我們愛人，才是實行天主的命令。從心裡去作愛人的工作，才是真愛人，這樣才能進入天主的生命，與天主合而為一。

讀經二：聖若望宗徒說：「我們要以行動和真誠去愛人，不可只用言語和口舌，這樣，我們便知道我們屬於真理，並且在祂面前可以安心」(19)。他的解釋——是彼此相愛是天主子女德性的表現，相反，仇恨報復卻是魔鬼子女的畛域。故「愛心」是脫離魔鬼與死亡的記號，「仇恨」表現出來的就是凶殺死亡。加音就是因為嫉妒殺了他的弟弟亞伯爾，(他們就是原祖和厄娃所生的兩個兒子)，叛徒茹達斯因起了惡念，隨了撒殫出賣了耶穌把祂釘死。而耶穌卻慷慨就義，終於戰勝死亡，重得了生命，這就是偉大愛情的例子。所以，我們要效法耶穌就必須愛人，這不是只尚口舌乖巧的空談，而是實實在在付諸行動的。若望他很清楚要言行合一的困難，他指出人可在慷慨激昂地講為人捨命的道理，但在日常生活上卻罔顧待人最根本的仁愛，正因為彼此缺乏真正的謙抑，無私和共融，甚至私下裡還因為愛而導致疑惑，恐懼和混亂。故他說：「假使有人說：我愛天主，但卻惱恨自己的弟兄，便是撒謊的；因為那不愛自己所看見的弟兄的，就不能愛自己所看不見的天主」(若一 四:20)。愛是須以行動和事實來證明我們對人的信賴和體諒，是要我們以言行合一的實現愛德，才能體會彼此相愛的真意。故主耶穌說：「你應全心、全靈、全意、愛上主你的天主，這是最大也是第一條誡命；第二條與此相似，你應當愛近人如你自己，全部法律和先知，都繫於這兩條誡命」(瑪 廿二:37-39)。故真正的愛是智慧，是堅忍，是「信德」純潔的果實；因著「信」我們覺悟天主是生活的實體。但信如無愛的具體表現，那只是「枯死的信」。愛是須由信心開始才得到開花吐放，它不單是一種情感，也更是一種能力，是要隨著信心的增強，細心的培育和體驗，在聖神的默啟和推動，走向淨化聖化的境界，人才會信得越堅，愛得越熾，如同初期教會就是在這共融通功的發展下而茁壯。因為他們認識到「天主是愛」，是生活的泉源，才會愛得越切，信得越篤。所以我你也該懷著堅信與摯愛，使一切紛爭，仇恨，罪惡消除，使基督奧體(教會)能真正在基督內合一，踏上圓滿共融的天國之途，以光榮我們的上主天主。

實說實話，我們可用今日若望一書的話，看看自己是否住在基督內。

第一，我們是否以「行動及真誠愛人」？自己在生活中有沒有一些我們憎恨或寬恕的人？

第二，是否「問心無愧」？在生活上有没有一些我們不能釋放的事，一些令我們感到慚愧，令我們不自由和不斷重複犯的罪過？是否有一些野心或佔有慾等影響著自己的愛心，使我們問心有愧？

第三，是否「在天主前可以『坦然無懼』」？有沒有一些令我們恐懼或害怕的事情，例如恐懼未來，恐懼失敗，恐懼死亡？當心裡有恐懼時，我們仍然未能圓滿地住在基督內。

在基督內結果實並非容易之事，讓我們跟隨若望的話，真心地向耶穌基督祈求，求祂「住在我們中間」，並使我們藉著祂結愛德的果實。