

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Fifth Sunday in Easter

By: Fr. Bob

A missionary in Africa lived in his central mission which had a small electric plant to supply current for his church and small rectory. Some natives from an outlying mission came to visit the padre. They noticed the electric light hanging from the ceiling of his living room. They watched wide-eyed as he turned the little switch and the light went on.

One of the visitors asked if he could have one of those bulbs. The priest, thinking he wanted it for a sort of trinket or bauble, gave him a burned-out bulb. On his next visit to the outlying mission the priest stopped at the hut of the man who had asked for the bulb. Imagine the priest's surprise when he saw the bulb hanging from an ordinary string. He had to explain that one had to have electricity and a wire to bring the current to the bulb.

On this fifth Sunday in Easter time we continue to learn how different we are, how changed we should be because of the power of Christ's resurrection. We read of how the early community, as recounted in the Acts of the Apostle, lived a different level of life, were transformed and untied with one another. Illustrating this change is the new relationship with Paul. Previously he had "uttered murderous threats" and had created a hostile environment. But now, changed by his incorporation into Jesus Christ, Paul and the community were one and were connected to one another. They belonged to one another and acted like it—they cared for one another and as the author of the second reading urges us, loved one another and remained in Christ—connected to Him.

Phil Cousineau, in an article entitled "*Soul is a Verb*" talks about "soulful moments." He talks about communal meals, teaching another as a teacher or coach or a mentor. Writing a letter to another to attend an art exhibit or a music performance or a poetry reading. These moments seem to make us connected and underline that we belong to something.

But Cousineau suggests, a lot of movement in today's life is away from this and away from others. That, he says, is part of the American myth of individualism. We are lone wolves, us against the world—individually, or sometimes as small, nuclear family. But the price we pay is a tremendous solitude and isolation.

On a hopeful note, Cousineau thinks that there is a revival of interest in reconnecting ourselves to the neighborhood, toward community action, political activity, reattaching with our family, our past, our ancestors. It is a curious notion that this kind of soulful life, connected life, tends not to be too consumed with future or evolution; instead, soul moves us backward, where we begin to contemplate the past.

As a matter of fact there is even an inspiring movement in architecture right now toward green design, in which architects and designers are reconsidering the material they use for buildings, the longevity of

buildings, how buildings fit in with the landscape, the community, the spirit of the place. This attitude nurtures the soulful essence of contemporary life by re-minding people of their connectedness to the rest of life.

Jesus' way is to connectedness. The vine is the image—and it's simple. Just as the light bulb can't work without being connected and the leaf of the vine withers unless it is connected, so too we need to belong to one another and realize our connectedness in order to survive.

Jamaka Highwater, the Native American writer, makes a distinction that is helpful for those of us today mired in the cult of individualism. He says that in Native American tradition, they didn't so much believe in the individual soul as they did in the collective soul. The word he uses is *orenda*. This can mean either of two things: the tribal soul or the tribal flame. Native tribes and also some African tribes believed that the soul of a clan, a tribe, or a village is flamelike, and it rises and falls. It's at its strongest when people are living for a common cause. When they are performing ritual together and praying together and hunting and reaming together the flame is at its strongest. That way of life is called "the red road." But if you turn away from the collective and you're only interested in yourself or the few souls around you, it's called walking "the black road," which is the road of selfishness and, often, violence.

The challenge of our Easter story, and this Easter season, is to walk in the way of the Savior. We are called to realize that because of our Baptisms we belong to our God and to one another.

The task of belonging to one another might seem daunting—being only for ourselves might sound freeing—indeed some connect our freedom with the right and the permission to care only for ourselves.

The reality is that sharing in one another's life means also sharing in one another's burdens.

Knowing that I am not alone in my pain and in my failure as well as in my resurrections and victories lightens my life and frees me in unbelievable ways.

To know that the one next to me is like me because of our common calling and history and destiny is what makes us whole.

And so we look about us this week and look for the ways in which we belong to one another and are responsible for one another and have created one another. We look and see the vine weaving through, the life of Jesus nourishing us and strengthening us a holding us close. We rejoice in the power it gives us to love.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

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

May 3, 2015

靈 修 生 活

我 是 真 葡 萄 樹

盧 嘉 勒

「我是真葡萄樹，我父是園丁。凡在我身上不結實的枝條，祂便剪掉；凡結實的，祂就清理，使它結更多的果實。」（若十五 1-2）

耶穌即將回到天父的身邊。麥子落在地裡死去，並結出許多果實的比喻，快要在祂的死亡和復活中兌現了。耶穌要履行的工程，就是在十字架上完全獻出祂自己（死去的麥子），然後透過祂的復活把生命賜給新人類（結實纍纍的麥穗）。

具體來說，我們如何能與葡萄樹接枝呢？耶穌解釋存留在祂內意味著存在祂的愛內（若十五 9），讓祂的聖言在我們內生活（若十五 7），並遵守祂的命令（若十五 10，尤其是「祂的」新誡命：你們該彼此相愛（若十五 12-17）。

「我父祂便剪掉」。天父這個決斷的行動不禁使我們對祂心生敬畏。因此，我們不能濫用祂的愛。正因為天主是愛，祂是公義的。如果祂剪掉枝條，那是因為祂看見枝條已經枯死；它已被自己所判決，因為它拒絕吸收樹液，因而再不能結出果實。

但這是否意味完全沒有希望呢？上主的葡萄園神妙莫測，祂曉得如何再把被剪掉的枝條接上樹幹。為此，我們還可以隨時悔改，重新開始。

「使它結更多的果實」。但我如何知道自己能否結果實呢？

任何行善的人必然會遇到考驗。考驗顯出天主對我們的愛，並能潔淨我們的行為，使我們能結更多的果實，就好像在自然界中對植物的修剪所產生的作用。

因此，人會遇到肉體和精神上的痛苦、疾病、誘惑、疑問、感到被天主離棄等等。

這句生活聖言向我們保證「考驗和困難」絕對不是最終的目的，而是為使我們結出「更多的果實」。這些果實不只限於使徒工作上的成果，燃起其他人的信德和建立基督徒團體能力。耶穌還指出其他的果實。祂曾許諾如果我們存留在祂的愛內，而祂的話也存在我們內，那麼無論我們求什麼，天父也必賜給我們（若十五 7，16）。這樣我們將光榮天父（若十五 8），而且我們的喜樂將會是圓滿無缺的（若十五 11）。

因此，完全將自己交托在天父熟練的手中，讓祂在我們內施工及修剪也是值得的。

普世博愛運動供稿

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 五 年 五 月 三 日

宗 9:26-31; 若一 3:18-24; 若 15:1-8