

FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER

YEAR B



Prayer

Psalm 22:26–28, 30–32

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Reading the Word

Acts 9:26–31

When Paul had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a dis-

ciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

1 John 3:18–24

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever

FIRST READING

Acts 9:26–31

PSALM

Psalm 22:26–28, 30–32

SECOND READING

1 John 3:18–24

GOSPEL

John 15:1–8

we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

John 15:1–8

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Who-

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ever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Hearing the Word

“Truth and Action”

The fifth Sunday of Easter addresses the question of the genuineness and integrity of discipleship. Truthfulness and fidelity to one’s identity and mission are expressed through outward actions. Today’s readings discuss what makes the believer a true disciple of Christ, and how that truth manifests itself to the world.

The first reading shifts attention from Peter, whose speeches were presented on the last two Sundays, to another key figure in the early Church, the apostle Paul. Soon after his conversion, Paul, still known by his Jewish name “Saul”, arrived in Jerusalem. He travelled from Damascus where – after having “seen the Lord” – he was transformed from a persecutor of the Church to an enthusiastic evangelizer. His zealous preaching and activities, in Damascus, met with such opposition that his life was put in danger. He eventually fled the city at night in a basket lowered from the city walls (see Acts 9:23-25). Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul found that the Christians there were afraid of him. After all, he was

a leading figure behind the killing of Stephen, and an aggressive and determined persecutor of Jesus’ disciples in the city. Not surprisingly, many Christians doubted the genuineness of his conversion, many “did not believe that he was a disciple”. Only Barnabas trusted Paul enough to introduce him to the leaders of the community, the apostles. Soon, Paul was “speaking boldly in the name of the Lord”. Once convinced of the truth of the resurrection and of Jesus’ lordship, Paul translated this conviction into fervent evangelizing actions. He carried out his mission with such zeal and determination that he eventually became the greatest apostle of the apostles.

In the second reading the author of 1 John continues to outline the basic guidelines for the life of his community. He consistently refers to its members as “the beloved”, reflecting his view that God’s love lies at the root of their Christian identity. He summarizes this identity through an admonition, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action”.

The truth the author refers to is not a philosophical concept. It is best understood through the words Jesus spoke before Pilate, when he said, “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). To belong to the truth means to listen to the voice of Jesus; it means to interiorize his words as the supreme guide for life. Remaining in Jesus’ words, in truth, leads to union with him

and the shaping of one’s life according to his teaching. Belonging to Jesus in this fashion helps to overcome doubt and fear. The author reassures believers that despite all doubts that they might have about themselves, their union with Jesus is the foundation for confidence in being accepted and loved by God who is “greater than our hearts”. Those living in truth may have “boldness before God”.

Living in truth means living “in Jesus”, which the author describes as “abiding” (see John 16:23). This life in truth, or abiding in Jesus, expresses itself in and through the action of love. This Christian love imitates God and Jesus in their utter commitment to those who choose to abide in Jesus. Such love seeks the greatest good of a fellow believer. It is a commitment to the cause of making a fellow human being live a fuller life. Consequently, the author sees the entire Christian life as the combination of faith and love. Faith in and unity with Christ leads to the practice of neighborly love. Abiding in Christ means that faith and love are inseparable, they correspond to truth and action.

The Gospel passage contains one of Jesus’ “I am” statements, “I am the true vine”. Like the other statements of this type in the Gospel of John, this one reveals something essential about Jesus and about his relationship to believers. The image of the vine and branches symbolizes a close link existing

between Jesus and the community. The life and fruitfulness of each member, of each “branch”, depends on its unbroken connection to the vine. Therefore, Jesus insists on the necessity to “abide in me as I abide in you”. Such intimate union is not a matter of choice but an existential necessity. Unless an unbroken link between Jesus and a believer exists, the latter cannot bear fruit, cannot be alive.

Just as in the first reading, the Gospel writer emphasizes that union with Jesus bears fruit in and through neighborly love. However, the Gospel passage adds an additional dimension to this teaching. The author speaks of God’s “pruning” of those who abide in Jesus. This pruning does not remove or cut anything off a believer. Jesus indicates that his followers have already been cleansed by his word. There is no need for further cleansing because they have already been instructed by their teacher in ways of life and led to believe in him on the strength of his word. This pruning, therefore, refers to God’s animation and inspiration at work in the believers leading to ever greater fruitfulness. Unity with Jesus makes it possible for God to act in the believers with the aim of increasing active love among them. This love is the benchmark of discipleship. However, the practice of such love by a true disciple also brings glory to God because it makes God’s love perceptible to the world and felt by others. The integrity of dis-

cipleship implies coherence between the claim to be a true disciple and actions that confirm such claims. Thus, the truthfulness of discipleship must be confirmed by acts of love. When performed, the same loving actions of the disciple demonstrate the truth that his or her God is indeed the God of love.

In the Christian view, truth and action are the inseparable characteristics of a true disciple. As the example of Paul shows, a claim to discipleship is proven true when a disciple carries out his or her special and unique mission with utmost dedication and seriousness. The author of I John teaches that to be fully human means to live in an intimate union with the creator. It means to be God’s beloved. This happens when a person embraces this identity with confidence and acts on it by loving others. John the evangelist makes this teaching even more specific by describing the disciple’s identity through the concept of abiding in Jesus. True disciples confirm who they are by acts of neighborly love. Such acts confirm that the faithful are true to their vocation and abide in Jesus. At the same time, they also demonstrate to the world that the God they believe in is truly the God of love. A disciple who abides in Jesus and acts according to the commandment of love can confidently say that the words of the Psalmist, “I shall live for him”, are true and visible in his or her life.

Listening to the Word of God

A young man with a restless heart came across the quote, “the truth shall set you free”. Desiring to experience the freedom that truth promises, he went in search of it. He searched for truth in luxurious living and acquired every kind of material comfort, but it eluded his grasp. Next, he sought truth in books and embraced all the academic degrees his arms could hold and yet he still felt a gnawing emptiness inside. Then he chose to embark on pilgrimages to all the religious sites he knew of but sadly he came home still empty and restless. One day, as he walked through the pathways of a shanty town, he came across an old man seated by his hut, beaming with a smile. He saw in the face of the old man the very thing he had been searching for – true freedom. “Tell me...what is the secret of that liberating smile on your face?”, he asked. The old man answered, “truth”. “Where did you find it?”, the young man continued. “In my little hut”, was the reply. Filled with curiosity, he followed the old man into the hut but found nothing except a mat. “Where is the truth?”, he asked. With a smile sparkling all over his face, the old man replied: “I found truth when I stopped searching for it and instead allowed myself to be found by it. Here on this mat, truth finds me every morning.”

Truth searches for every human being and those who allow themselves to be found are liberated by it. Unfortunately, many of us are so

much preoccupied with so many other things that we never allow truth to find us and, consequently, we live our lives enslaved by our untamed passions.

If God had placed truth in material wealth, only the rich would possess it. If truth was to be found in books, only the learned would get it. If truth resided at religious sites, only the religious would possess it. Thankfully, truth is available and accessible to all.

Paul was a restless young man filled with burning passion for what he held as truth. Believing that Christ and his followers were heretics, he set off to quench the glowing faith of Christians. However, on the road to Damascus, truth found him in a dramatic fashion. In that instance, he found something in Christ that he never discovered at the feet of the great Gamaliel or in the religious organisation he belonged to – the Pharisees. The truth he experienced had an impact on him and expressed itself in actions. His heart was ignited with a divine flame. Emboldened by this experience he took the risk of standing up and being counted as a disciple of Christ.

In exhorting his audience to love, not just in word or speech, but in truth and action, the author of 1 John uses the expression, "...we are from the truth". Doing so, he connects every believer to the source, who is Jesus Christ. He is the true vine, and we are the branches. It is when we are in union with Christ that truth translates itself into

action. That is when loving becomes part and parcel of our being. We are able to reach out and serve people without counting the cost.

There is proverb which says that "Truth is like the wind. You cannot touch it but you know when it is near." Truth is both experiential and exponential. It is experiential in as far as it has a lasting effect on a person, and exponential in that it ignites and sends forth a person into action like a rocket.

In this Eastertide, we celebrate the mystery that truth never dies. In union with the resurrected Christ we carry with us the fragrance of truth as we make tangible, not just in word or speech but in action, the love of God for all humanity.

Proverb

**"Truth is like
the wind.
You cannot
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Action

Self-examination

Does love express itself in my life in truth and action? What are these actions?

Do my deeds correspond with the faith I profess in Church? Name some of them.

Response to God

God is truth and in him we live and have our being. In choosing to surrender to truth, I surrender to God. And in surrendering to God I find my true self.

Response to your World

In a world where the desire for happiness has led many to embark on frivolous pursuits, I will seek to focus myself on Christ as the truth, and make him my chief concern amid the daily concerns.

As Christians who are called upon to proclaim the Gospel of truth, we will examine our group activities and check if our actions correspond to the beliefs we hold and the message we preach.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your name is Truth. In union with you, we are able to bear fruit that lasts, but cut off from you we perish. We therefore pray that, aided by your grace, we will grow in you and you in us. Teach us to treasure your words in our hearts and translate them into actions that please you. For the sake of your name, we pray. Amen.