

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 1, 1994

Acts 9:26-31

When Saul 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 disciple. 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 Saul 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 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

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 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. Whoever 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."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The members of the small faith community of Jerusalem were hesitant to include Saul. How do you feel about admitting new members into your group? Why?

2. How does your parish community welcome new members?

3. Read Acts 9:31, the verse that concludes the first reading. How does this passage relate to our church today?

Karen Neuser/Kathy Prather ☐

# Jesus is vine and vine dresser

## THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



19:10-14). From the New Testament, we expect that wayward plants will be gathered up and destroyed at the final judgment (Matthew 3:10 and 13:30). The return of this theme forms a lump in our throats.

But Jesus also emphasizes the positive aspect of this image. He rejoices in the union of vine and branches, and the life that the vine offers to those that cling. "Abide in me," he says, "as I abide in you." Although he warns that withered branches will be tossed away, this vine-dresser has more interest in cultivation than in strip mining.

**WHY THIS CONCERN** about withered branches? There are two reasons. First the unfaithful branches may be those whose faith weakens from the threat of persecution. At the time John wrote his Gospel (about 100 A.D.), that persecution took life-threatening forms against the early Church. Today's persecution is more subtle: society's greed taints our moral decision-making; the lure of sensuality causes us to compromise long-held beliefs; the evil influence of others tempts us to cheat the Gospel. The vine-dresser warns that these withered branches will be pruned away.

This leads us to the second reason for this concern. If the withered branches are not discarded, they will hurt and divide the entire vine. Jesus appeals to his followers for unity and love.

When Jesus calls himself the "true" vine, he reminds us of his self-description as the "good" or "model" shepherd. He is the best vine. He is the vine responsible for the branches. For us then, "keeping the commandments" simply means "loving Christ." And "abiding in Christ" means "being at prayer." In Christ we find our union, and he yearns to make it true.

**HEARING THIS TEXT** in the Easter season gives it a baptismal context. On Easter day we celebrate the baptism of new members in our Church. Those who have been members longer renew our own baptismal promises. Now as we enter the season of Christ's resurrected life, we celebrate the season of our baptized Christian life. That life should be characterized by union with Christ.

A month after Easter, what's happened to our lenten resolutions? Are we faithful to our baptismal promises? Where will the vine-dresser prune us? Our parishes? Our society? Our Church?

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## Daily Scripture Readings

### Fourth Sunday of Easter Sunday, April 24, 1994

Acts 4:8-12  
Psalms 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 29  
1 John 3:1-2  
John 10:11-18

### Monday, April 25

1 Peter 5:5-14  
Psalms 89:2-3, 6-7, 16-17  
Mark 16:15-20

### Tuesday, April 26

Acts 11:19-26  
Psalms 87:1-7  
John 10:22-30

### Wednesday, April 27

Acts 12:24-13:5  
Psalms 67:2-3, 5-6, 8  
John 12:44-50

### Thursday, April 28

Acts 13:13-25  
Psalms 89:2-3, 21-22, 25, 27  
John 13:16-20

### Friday, April 29

Acts 13:26-33  
Psalms 2:6-11  
John 14:1-6

### Saturday, April 30

Acts 13:44-52  
Psalms 98:1-4  
John 14:7-14

### Fifth Sunday in Easter Sunday, May 1

Acts 9:26-31  
Psalms 22:26-28, 30-32  
1 John 3:18-24  
John 15:1-8

