

HOMILY - Fifth Sunday of Easter B.

I opened the play with the words “I’ll take a glass of wine Mackintosh, nunc est bibendum.” Unfortunately my pronunciation of “Glarss” was insufficiently RP & I was given the smaller part of the priest. The fruit of the vine: – a wine jar decorated with fruit from Tblisi in Georgia & wine jar & wine press from Iran date back to 8k & 6K years resp. The fruit of the vine. This mouldy old fruit tastes nice erm why can’t my feet move in a straight line? I can’t feel my legs. I wonder how they discovered it?

The countries around the Mediterranean have been at it for a long time, no less Israel, such that it assumed the title of God’s Vineyard, and figures in a number of parables of Jesus in the synoptic gospels relating to the Kingdom of God. Somebody described John’s gospel as trying to identify what is in the box only by touch and feel as opposed to seeing it. What do we feel is emerging from that gospel when Jesus says I am the Vine.?

GQT BCCR4 a questioner asked the panel for the least labour-saving plant (perhaps as a punishment for her husband) The vine because you are always pruning pruning pruning pruning. You have a job for life. So we can imagine the Father tending his vine, hacking off those fruitless hunks of branches, pruning back other growth if fruitful branches have been identified so their fruit is larger & juicier & better. It may sound painful but it’s for the good of the fruit. You are pruned by my Word; do we allow our hearing or reading of the Word to help us prune away our less useful attitudes & actions, to cleanse us?

The fruit of the vine. In one of the OT passages God is sick of the sour grapes/wild bitter grapes that Israel, the vineyard produces, meaning the behaviour of its people, wars, arguments, exploitation, lies, extortion. How are we? Are we providing no fruit, bitter fruit, sweet juicy fruit. “It is to the glory of the Father” if we are producing good fruit. I am the Vine, you are the branches. Where does the vine become branches? Is there part of the plant we can say that is vine & that is branches? – it’s all one isn’t it? If we are living lives that allows the sap of the True Vine to course through the branches, through our veins, (as one of the fathers described the Blood of Christ in us) not apart from him, but dependant on him for our life-blood, trusting him for all we do our fruit will not only be sweet to those who taste it, but it will please the Father because it will give him glory. First Eucharistic prayer 3 times talks of our sacrifice, being pleasing to God.

When did Jesus pronounce these words? The Last Supper – again John does not describe the paschal meal, but we see Jesus get down on the floor to wash the feet of his disciples. In our service of one another – care of our sick, the orphan children of Pakistan, the poor through foodbank & the Little

Sisters, the refugees, the women refugees they want to house in a prison, the addicts, prisoners, our fruit gives glory to God. Many people are tired of words, they are more touched by the taste of fruitful action. Then Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane, the place where the olive is pressed, to be crushed and as he asks for this the 4th cup of wine normally associated with the Passover meal to be taken away, he accepts it and sweats the first drops of the blood to be poured out, the first squeeze of fruit of the vine as if in the wine press.

Can we see examples of the branches producing good fruit in the Word? Haven't we just seen Barnabas living out his name, Son of Encouragement, as he encourages the fears and anxieties of the other disciples to be pruned away as he describes the new-found activity of Saul aka Paul, so that Paul can come and preach and work with them and flourish. We see the love they soon have for him as they protect him from the Hellenists who have a death-threat on him. Where else do we see vine-fed branches producing good fruit to the glory of the Father – on the news, in the lives of people around us, in our parish?

United on the True Vine, may the fruit we bear from our branches be sweet as we serve one another in love bringing safety and protection to those in our care, as we give glory to God.