

Homily – John 15: 1-8
Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B
01 May / 02 May 2021, Sooeey

“Apart from me you can do nothing”

There is a scene in the movie, *Shadow of the Hawk* where a young couple is climbing a mountain with the help of their Indian guide in a desperate attempt to flee from evil people. At one point the young woman slumps to the ground and says, “I can’t take another step.” The young man lifts her to her feet and says, “But darling, we must go on. We have no other choice!” She shakes her head and says, “I can’t go on! I can’t go on!” Then the Indian guide advises the young man, “Hold her close to your heart. Let your strength and your courage flow out of your body into hers.” The young man does this and in a few minutes the woman smiles and says, “Now I can go on! Now I can do it!”

Well, the Readings of today emphasize the need for Christians to abide in Christ as a condition for producing fruits of kindness, mercy, charity, and holiness. And in the Gospel, taken from the Last Supper discourse, Jesus uses his favorite image of the vine and branches to help His disciples understand the closeness of their relationship with Him and the necessity of their maintaining it.

They are not simply rabbi and disciples. Their lives are mutually dependent – as close as a vine and its branches. In fact, in using this image, Jesus is explaining to them and to us what our relationship with Christ should be like. The parable reminds us that united with Jesus, we can do anything, but separated from Jesus, we are good for nothing.

Fr. George Kottipallil, a Salesian Priest, who was a Professor of Church History at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Shillong, India contracted cancer in his early 50s. He was practically on his death bed now, but the people who visited him found him very cheerful. And one of his friends who visited him had this question to ask him: “George, you look so happy and serene. And I suppose you are not let down by the fact that you’re not able to give any more lectures or write books?” With a gentle smile on his face Fr. George now replied: “No, I do not feel sad anymore, because looking back I feel I was a successful Professor before, but now, I am fruitful”.

In the Gospel reading of today, Jesus tells us that God keeps us in existence so that we may produce fruit, so that we may bear fruit. He tells us that every branch that does not bear fruit, He cuts away and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes so that it may bear more fruit, it

may bear abundant fruit. So, God gives us life so that we may bear fruit. The thrust of this statement is not that God will reject us if we do not produce fruit, but that He gives us life, He keeps us in existence so that we may bear much fruit.

Often times in life, the natural tendency of every human being is to run after success than to have the wisdom to be fruitful. Yes! People are after name, fame, riches and position that they become too self-centred, ceasing to be other-centred.

A few years ago, I happened to come across a touching article written by the Late Manohar Parikkar, who was the Chief Minister of Goa from 2017-2019. Goa is one of the 29 states in India. Now, Manohar Parikkar was undergoing a treatment for his pancreatic cancer while writing this inspiring article in which he said the following: “Today in this bedridden state, I introspect my life...the popularity and the wealth that I thought to be milestones of life. In addition, the inflated ego...all of it appears to be meaningless as I stand facing death. And at this critical moment, I have understood that there is so much more to life than accumulating wealth and fame. I realize that of all the political success that I have earned, I can carry nothing with me. This bed of sickness is the most exclusive bed as nobody can use it

except you. And he concludes: “As you run through the rat race of life pursuing success, one must realize that at some point of time, you have to reach the last part of the drama in the theatre where the end of the show is visible. So, learn to look after yourself, take care of others, learn to spend your money and shower your feelings on people around you”.

A person, who apparently was very successful in life, now in his sickness and pain, realizes the need to be fruitful. Dear friends, only fruitful persons leave a lasting memory, an indelible mark, in the lives of others.

And how much fruit does Jesus want us to produce? Not little. In verse 8 of Chapter 15 of John, Jesus tells us, that we give glory to the Father, when we produce much fruit. And the reason for this is given in the Gospel of Luke chapter 12 Verses 47 and 48, wherein Jesus says that we have to bear much fruit because we have been given much. Yes! All of us have received much: our life, our families, our talents and all that we are and all that we have. Actually, there is nothing in us or around us that we have not received from God. And St. Paul would rightly put it in 1st Corinthians 4/7 when he says: “What do you have that you did not receive?”.

Yes! God has given us everything. God has given us Himself. God has given us Jesus. If so, we need to respond to God by producing much fruit, by giving much in return. And the secret of doing this is given in John chapter 15 verse 5: “Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because, apart from me you can do nothing”.

All of us would agree that one of the persons who has borne much fruit in her life is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In an interview with ‘Time Magazine’, Mother Teresa once said: “I don’t think that I could do this work for even one week if I did not have 4 hours of prayer every day”. Well! Mother Teresa was able to bear much fruit because she let God abide in her and she was totally united with the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, the invitation of the Lord to you and me today is this, that we need to let God abide in us and that we need to abide in the Lord. And, that shall be the key to be fruitful in life. The heart of Jesus has been pierced by the soldiers; it has been opened for us. Now, we need to enter the heart of Jesus. We must abide in the heart of Jesus.

Let me conclude my homily with an incident shared by Mother Teresa who remained connected to the Lord throughout her life.

Once Mother Teresa brought a girl child from the street and she says she could see in the face of the child that the child was hungry. Probably, the girl had not eaten for days. And so Mother Teresa gave her a piece of bread and the little girl started eating that slice of bread ‘crumb by crumb’. And Mother told her: “Eat, eat the bread”. And the little girl looked at Mother Teresa and said: “I am afraid to eat the bread, because I am afraid when it’s finished, I will be hungry again”. This is the reality, says Mother Teresa.

May be we are not hungry for a piece of bread. But, there may be somebody in the family or in our neighbourhood who is unwanted, unloved, uncared for or forgotten”. And today, in this time of crisis, we hear the cries of people from all corners of the world. Well, if only we could have a heart for them. That is all God asks of us today.

Remember! God has not called us to be successful, but fruitful abiding in His love and radiating that love to our brothers and sisters we encounter in our day to day life. God bless you all, **Amen.**