

5th Sunday Easter (B)

- One of the greatest human needs is to belong - to be comfortable with people who welcome me, & with whom I can feel at home to be myself.
- The group with whom I have a sense of belonging isn't just where I can relax, but the people who give me my identity, meaning, purpose & values in life.
- Belonging to a group of people is fundamental because we are dependent on the others for life more than just existence.
- The group may be a social or sporting club, a group of faithful friends; more usually it is family; & the test for the viability of a group or community is its unity & life-giving strength for all its members.
- The image of the vine & branches is an old one that goes back beyond the time of Jesus to where Israel understood itself as the vine, & God, the vinedresser, the one who plants, nurtures, prunes & harvests the vine.
- The life & well-being of each branch, each person, is dependent on their being attached to the vine & to one another & ultimately on the one who cares for the vine – a beautiful image of our interconnectedness & dependency, not just on Jesus, who calls himself the vine, & therefore the source of our lives, but also of our dependency on one another.
- Jesus uses the image of the vine to describe the interdependence of the church – the church being us, its members.
- As Australians, we have a tradition of self-reliance, of “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps,” of going it alone, & shunning the help of others.
- We may ask, “Why have someone else do for me what I can do for myself?”
- We are independent, motivated, & industrious, & we believe this, in part, has made our country great.
- In today's Gospel, however, Jesus offers us a challenge to this way of thinking, Jesus says: “Without me, you can do nothing.” How seriously do we take this?
- Yes, we turn to God in time of illness, in time of difficulty, or maybe when we have an important decision to make; but do we really believe, “Without Jesus, we can do nothing”? Most of our lives indicate something different.
- It is as if we are constantly saying, “Without my energy, my work ethic, my enthusiasm, my talents, my intellect, my money ... I can do nothing.”
- But if it's all about us & what we make possible, then we really don't need a God - we don't need Jesus.
- It is in our poverty, our frailty, our sinfulness, our sense of inadequacy & failure—as uncomfortable as all of these are to us—that we find space in our hearts for God.
- How often have we grown closer to him when we realized that we were helpless in some way, that we weren't ultimately in control?
- When you think about it, Jesus wrote no books; he left no buildings or monuments behind, yet he did something far greater & more necessary, though less ostentatious & therefore more easily missed, he built a community - that was his legacy; there is nothing more life-giving & strengthening of individuals

than relationship with one another at a deeper level than just common interests or hobbies. Today's gospel is about unity in love.

- John uses Jesus' own image of the vine & branches to say that a Christian community must stay together, support & strengthen each other & have Jesus as their head & life-giving source of unity & love.
- It is a wonderful analogy of the Church—one organic whole with Jesus at the centre from whom all the branches draw life & nourishment.
- However, the opposite is also true.
- When we separate ourselves from Christ we no longer receive nourishment from him & consequently the divine life within us can only wither & die.
- Love is the very life-blood of the Christian community – a love that is self-giving for the sake of each other.
- People who say they don't go to Mass; don't belong to a church because they don't get anything from it, or because it's boring, are asking the wrong questions – do people go to a birthday party or a wedding celebration or a funeral or visit someone who is ill with the question of whether it will be boring or not, whether they'll gain anything from it or not; we go to these things & do these things because we want to be with the ones we love in their joys, struggles & tragedies – to support them in love.
- The Eucharist is **the sign** of our unity with one another in Christ – we need one another & especially when external forces beyond our control threaten us.
- Our strength is unity in love – nothing will hurt a particular church community or parish more than its failure to love - It's no wonder that people condemn us when we are seen to betray our own standards of unity & love.
- It's not easy being a follower of Jesus, even in our own time & it's not easy to belong to one another especially when we get hurt or offended by one another, but if we are followers of Jesus, there is no other way.
- From the earliest of times, following Jesus was never just a private, personal matter; belief, for us, isn't just belief in Jesus Christ & his message, but a commitment to Jesus, the vine, & to one another, the branches.
- We draw life, meaning, purposefulness & energy from Christ **with** one another & it is **with** each other that we live these out & not even just for ourselves or for one another, but for the life & sake of the world.
- The Eucharist is about God's way of working through us to transform the world.
- That is what the Eucharist is ultimately about – God's great desire to pour out his love for us by living within us, strengthening us & enabling us to live life to the fullest so that we might be the expression of God's care & love for others.
- We pray that God may always nourish you throughout your lives through your frequent reception of communion.
- Always know how much you are loved & never abandoned by God.
- And may the love you experience be the love you extend to others.