

SUNDAY EASTER 05 B – Homily 02

“Believe and Love”

(Acts 9:26-31; Psalm 22; 1 John 3:18-24; Jn 15:1-8)

Image a plant, a vine with a strong stem reaching up to heaven, and numerous branches reaching out around the whole world.

That imaginary plant is a metaphor for us today. The stalk is faith in Jesus, while the branches are our love for all of humanity.

That is the simple and clear message from today’s readings for us: Believe in Jesus and love all others.

Faith in Jesus comes first. We are called to believe with all our hearts and minds that Jesus is truly the Risen Lord. We are invited to express that belief through faithful prayer; in petitions; through joyful praise; worship with faith communities and reading of the scriptures. We are especially invited to submit to doing His will which is to love one another. Faith in Jesus and love for others goes together like branches on a vine.

Love for others involves caring, selfless service and trust, sharing and fellowship. In the context of a family it means that parents especially must try to answer the emotional needs of the children to be loved, to belong and to be valued. They do that through expressed affection, presence, listening, spending time with, affirming and blessing the children, discipline and guidance.

It also involves forgiveness, especially for those who hurt us. To be able to deal with our anger, express it with love to the one who hurt us and let it go is paramount in terms of loving others.

Jesus is the best example of that kind of agape love. Totally grounded in the Father’s love for him, he was able to give himself selflessly for us, to the point of accepting death on a cross. More, he was also able to forgive those who were killing him as he lay dying on the cross.

St. Paul is another outstanding example of faith that leads to a life of love. His encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus transformed his whole belief system. When he had allowed what had happened to penetrate

his awareness, then he started to give himself totally to sharing with the world what had happened to him, and who Jesus now was for him. He had fallen in love with Jesus and wanted the whole world to do the same.

St. Stephen, the first martyr, also serves as an example for us today. According to Corbin Eddy, in his commentary on today's readings, a Bishop Beahan preached at a confirmation on this Sunday in his parish. He was convinced that the reason that Saul was ready to meet the Lord Jesus and open to change, was that Saul had already met the Lord through the witness of St. Stephen's death. You will recall that Saul was there, giving his approval as those who stoned Stephen put their cloaks at Saul's feet.

Surely the way Stephen died just like Jesus, forgiving those who were killing him, must have started to penetrate Saul's protective religious defence system. His conscience must have been bothering him, throwing him a little off balance, making him wonder who this Jesus was that Stephen believed in and died for so readily. Then suddenly, on the road, he met that same Jesus, and was converted to become a disciple of the very Jesus he was persecuting.

Someone else who has lived the message of this Sunday's gospel, who is truly a branch of the vine who is Jesus, who truly believes and bears fruit, is a woman I will call Velma. She was able to not only forgive the man who sexually abused her thirty five years earlier, but was also able to apologize to him for the way she had treated him all those years. She then got up and gave him a hug. I have since then seen her dance with him and sit at a banquet with him.

A religious sister who heard her story at a retreat came up to me after to claim that was impossible. I told her it was for most of us, but I was there and saw it myself. I reminded her that with God, all things are possible. Truly, Velma did not do that on her own power. It was her strong faith in Jesus and his love for her that empowered her to forgive as Jesus had forgiven. She was a disciple bearing much fruit, just like St. Stephen, and now like St. Paul.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today makes present for us, through Word and Sacrament, that same love of Jesus that was shown on the cross when he forgave his abusers.

May our celebration today strengthen our faith in Him and empower us to go out and love all others, especially our enemies, with understanding and forgiveness. May we be true disciples who believe in him, and bear much fruit through our love for all