

5th Sunday in Easter (B)

05/03/2015

When I was assigned, on one occasion, as a pastor, the staff, not knowing me, searched in the **Diocesan Directory** to find a picture of me. The picture that they saw was not one of my better pictures, and it caused them some concerns. It was only after they met me personally - **delightful as I am** - that many of their concerns were quieted.

Something similar happens with **Paul** and the followers of **Jesus the Christ** living in **Jerusalem**. The picture that they have of him is that of a **zealous Pharisee** who is **accusing** followers of **Jesus** of **blasphemy** and either imprisoning them or murdering them. The followers of **Jesus**, as a result, have **grave concerns** and **doubts** about **Paul** and his supposed **transformation**. **Barnabas**, however, takes the risk and meets with **Paul**. His **willingness** not to place **limits** on what **God** can do, **frees** him to see the **transformation** that is taking place in **Paul**. **Barnabas**, in turn, encourages the other disciples too to be **willing not to limit** what **God** can do, and to meet with **Paul**.

One of the first **characteristics** that **God** reveals to us in the **Scriptures** is that **God is free**. **God is not limited** in anyway. That is, **God does not judge**. **God**, instead, is always **open to new possibilities**. The **Jewish** people **struggle** with this revelation. As do we. The **human tendency** is to **set limits** - **judge**, and attempt to **set limits** for **God** too. **Limitations** are not **bad** and can be **helpful**. They can also **prevent** us from **knowing** the **freedom of God**.

Our **gospel** reading from **John**, however, **cautions** us that we cannot **live** in the **freedom of God** too soon or by our own power. When an **immature** vine bears grapes, it **drains** the roots of the

energy that they need to **push** through the soil and become **connected** with nutrients that will sustain them. It is only when the vine **matures** by the numerous **prunings** and prevented from **bearing grapes** that the roots have the **necessary energy** to **push** through the soil and find **unlimited energy**.

The **pruning** of the vine is like the **adversities and failures** that we **encounter** in our everyday lives. Unfortunately, **culture and society** do not see **any value** in **adversity and failure**... unless, of course, we also **successfully overcome** them. That is, unless we find a way to **successfully overcome** the **perceived** handicap of being **pruned** - by **adversities and failures** - and **bear grapes** nonetheless.

Our **willingness** to **practice observing** rather than **judging, accusing, or condemning** when **adversities, inconveniences or failures** happen, provides us with the **necessary energy** to discover that **God** is in **union** with us. Once we **know** this **union**, our world **expands** beyond our human **limitations**. We readily live the **relational nature** with which we are created... as **Barnabas** does in our opening story from the **Acts of the Apostles**, when unlike the other **disciples**, he is **free** to meet and see the **change** in **Paul**. Hopefully, we too **know** people who are **free** and **empowered** by the **Spirit**. Hopefully, we too **know** or come to know the **limitless power** of the **freedom of God** to live **open** and **receptive** lives.

(First Communion Homily)

05.03.15

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An example of our **willfully** bearing grapes before we are ready can be **thinking** that we have to make ourselves **worthy** to receive **Communion**. That is, we try to **get rid** of our **sins** and make ourselves **perfect** so that we can **worthily** receive **Communion**. The truth is that **God** prunes by **inviting** us to receive **Communion** while we are **not worthy**. When we **practice** being willing to be pruned by **God** - by frequently receiving **Communion** - we come to **know** that **worthiness** isn't important. **Knowing Jesus'** desire to be **one with us** is what is important!

I encourage you then to **practice knowing** the desire of **Jesus** to be one with us, by receiving **Communion** as often as you can. You will, in this way, become more and more convinced of what **Jesus and God** already **know**: that **Jesus and God** is always with you.