**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for may 2, 2021**

**fifth sunday of easter**

*“…you are the branches.”*



Image: [Hermanoleon Clipart](http://www.cruzblanca.org/hermanoleon/sem/b/pasq/05/5pasc.htm)

http://www.textweek.com/yearb/easterb5.htm

**CHECK-IN** and then Betty mutes everyone. **(Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Betty Thompson)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Richard McGinnis for preparing today’s communal prayer and to Linda Donaldson and Reggie Ott for making our music.
* Thanks also to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Pat and Greg Campbell, Charlotte Cook, Karen McCarthy, Maryann Dolan, Mia and Tim Brown, Mary Ott, Donna Ellerman, Sr. Jo’Ann De Quattro and Sr. Jennie Lechtenberg.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Richard McGinnis)**

Let’s quiet ourselves so we can be attentive to what God hopes for us today. Be still. Center yourself in the love of God and of one another. Notice your breath as it goes in and out…. Let it slow and deepen… and fill you with the peace of Christ. We begin with 3 deep breaths. One to be here… one to be together… and one to welcome in the Spirit who never leaves us.

Now Linda Donaldson will lead us into our prayerful song together.

**OPENING SONG Sing a New Song unto the Lord-Daniel Schutte** **(Linda Donaldson)**

Refrain

Sing a new song unto the Lord;

Let your song be sung from mountains high.

Sing a new song unto the Lord, singing hallelujah!

Verse 1

Shout with gladness!

Dance for joy!

O come before the Lord.

And play for God on glad tambourines, and let your trumpet sound. *Refrain*

Verse 2

Rise, O children from your sleep;

Your Savior now has come.

He has turned your sorrow to joy; and filled your soul with song. *Refrain*

**GREETING (Pat Campbell)**

Let us rejoice, for Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

All: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**CALL TO WORSHIP / GATHERING PRAYER** **(Pat Campbell)**

We come together today to remember Jesus. Jesus shows us that human life can be made entirely of love. To live that way, we need to remain in union with Jesus and to open our hearts to each other. So, we come to let the light of Easter shine in our hearts and show us our next step into God’s kingdom.

Loving God, thank you for living and loving in us and through us.

Teach us how to be a community of contagious peace –

to put on your mind and your heart

so that we see each other and all that is with your eyes of love. May the way of blessing become our way.

Amen.

Richard McGinnis will now introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Richard McGinnis)**

In the readings for today we hear the familiar image of Jesus as the vine and us as his branches. Scripture teaches that remaining united in Christ is essential for a life of fruitful behavior that bears witness to God.  We live meaningful lives when we explore, nurture and develop our relationship with Christ.  And this is the work of our lifetime if we want the Spirit to work in us and enable us to act with love.

While God is constantly reaching out to us in love, our hearts can betray us and distract us in ways that are not life-giving.  The scriptures contrast union with Jesus and separation; fruitfulness with barrenness; empowerment to act boldly with actions that are without true purpose. The readings emphasize our **choice** to be branches of God’s vine.

In Acts we see Saul (later known as Paul) speaking boldly after he has been transformed in his encounter with the Lord.  Notice the role of Barnabas in this story. Because of Barnabas, Saul is able to act boldly as a disciple of Jesus. The reading about Saul demonstrates what we then read in the first letter of John – that authentic love requires actions done in truth, and not only words.

Sister Mary McGlone reflects on the overarching message of these readings that we are invited to an ever deeper relationship with Jesus in order to grow continuously in love and service.

As we prepare to reflect upon the challenge to open our hearts, I invite you to enter silent contemplation for a minute with an image by Jan Richardson, the title of which reminds us of an everlasting truth-- “Beloved Is Where We Begin.”



**COMTEMPLATION OF IMAGE “BELOVED”** **(Betty**: Insert Image. Time 1:00, chime, stop)

**(Richard)** Now Susan Harford will read from Acts and the first letter of John, and Charlotte Cook will offer questions for you to consider in silence. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1**  **(Susan Harford)**

**Acts 9:26-31**

When he came to Jerusalem, Saul tried to join the disciples,
but they were all afraid of him,
not believing that he really was a disciple.
But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea
and sent him off to Tarsus. Then, the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. *(Slight pause.)*

**1 JN 3:18, 23**

.., let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth….And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and to love one another as he commanded us.

(*Slight pause.)*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Charlotte Cook)**

Who is your Barnabas? When you face a spiritual quandary, who or what do you trust for insight?”

What would it look like to you for your church to be “at peace”?

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**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Insert “The Conversion of St. Paul” and **s**hare slide w/questions, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

 **(Richard)** Now Karen McCarthy will read from the Gospel of John.

**READING 2 GOSPEL JN 15:1-7 (Karen McCarthy)**

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown in to the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you; ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

*(Slight pause)*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Charlotte Cook)**

What vines keep you connected to the source of divine love and fruitful behavior?

In what ways has your heart sought to separate you from that life-giving love?

How has a “whatever you wish” request been fulfilled for you?



**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Insert the grapevine image and share slide w/questions, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**(Richard)** Now Maryann Dolan will read an excerpt from a reflection by Sister Mary M. McGlone for the Fifth Sunday of Easter from the National Catholic Reporter.

**READING 3 (Maryann Dolan)**

Paul, the zealous convert, found that he was not easily welcomed by the Jerusalem Christians…Their experience warned them they should fear Paul, but the reliable apostle Barnabas verified Paul's authenticity as a disciple who had met the risen Christ and testified to him.

The First Letter of John tells us, "Let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and truth." This makes a teaching of what Barnabas testified on behalf of Paul: The proof of commitment is not in words and speech but deed and truth.

…For John, belief in Jesus is not an intellectual exercise but the motivator of all our activity.

Today's Gospel emphasizes one of Jesus' solemn "I am" pronouncements: "I am the vine."

Jesus had already identified himself as the living bread, the light of the world, the sheep-gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, and the way, the truth and the life. Each of those statements reflected on his relationship to the disciples, pledging that he would nourish, guide, protect and lead them, and endow them with life and true knowledge.

The image of Jesus as the vine and us as the branches crowns all the rest. This metaphor goes beyond all that he has said before and paints a picture of what he would later pray: "May all be one, as you Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us." By using the image of vine and branches, Jesus explains that we are an intimate, inextricable part of him and of one another.

The image lures us to explore the depths of our connection to the God of life. It reminds us that whether or not we recognize it, we are dependent on God.

At the same time, both the image and Jesus' prayer for unity recognize that it is up to us to play our part. Our life and potential come from God, but we are the ones who choose to bear fruit or to choke ourselves off from the vine.

Jesus' "I am" statements are revelation, his self-description and his explanation of what that means for us. They are therefore an ongoing invitation to relationship with him.

Today's readings remind us that we must continually choose who we truly want to be. God always offers us the option of being fruitful branches, receiving and giving divine life. We are called to choose our real identity just as really and radically as Saul chose to become an apostle. We are invited to be true, continuously growing in love….

*(Slight pause)*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Charlotte Cook)**

What has motivated you to speak out and to act boldly as a witness?

What has helped you nurture and grow your relationship with God; how has pruning played a part?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Share slide w/questions, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

(Richard) Tim Brown will now lead our sharing.

**SHARING TIME (Tim Brown)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening,

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. *[Long-ish pause]*

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

[If there is silence of more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Pause.]*

[Stop by about 11:20.]

Thank you.

Now Mia Brown will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY(Mia Brown)**

God loves us and all creation. And so with confidence we offer our prayers. Let’s pause to notice the prayers that rise in us now. *(Pause)* Our response will be: “Lord, remain in us and grant our wish.”

Lord, draw us closer to you and grant us the grace to surrender our hearts so that we love one another not only in word but in life-giving action. For this we pray. Lord, remain in us and grant our wish.

Lord, may we have eyes to see and hearts to understand what it is that you call us to do. May our way become a way of blessing our to our neighbors who are poor, broken, vulnerable, and marginalized. For this we pray. Lord, remain in us and grant our wish.

Lord, bless the work of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and of the congregations which they support, as they continue to be an active sign of your love. For this we pray. Lord, remain in us and grant our wish.

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Shared prayers)

Loving God, we place all of our prayers, those spoken and those unspoken, into your loving care. We will do all that we can to put our prayers into action – while entrusting the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Mary Ott)**

In this Easter season, we celebrate the amazing gift of Christ among us. What does it mean to offer yourself to God in gratitude? In the bright light of Easter, what call do you see for yourself this week? *[Long-ish pause.]*

Let us pray. Generous God, Creative Spirit, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Richard**: Now, Donna Ellerman will lead us in the celebration of Communion.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Donna Ellerman)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us. *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. *[Pause.]*

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. *[Pause.]*

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Sr. Jo’Ann De Quattro)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

***All (muted):*** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Sr. Jennie Lechtenberg)**

Living God,
long ago, faithful women
proclaimed the good news
of Jesus' resurrection,
and the world was changed forever.

Bless us—so that we keep faith with them, and our witness may be as bold, our love as deep, and our faith as true. Amen.

**(Richard)** Now Reggie Ott will lead us in the African American spiritual, “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me.”

**CLOSING SONG I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”- African American Spiritual (Reggie Ott)**

I’m gonna live so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna live so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna pray so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna pray so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna sing so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

I’m gonna sing so God can use me anywhere, Lord, any time!

**RESOURCES**

Scripture and Reflection, excerpted and adapted.

Acts 9:26-31, 1 JN 3:18, 23, and John 15:1-7. New International Version Cultural Studies Bible (Zondervan 2016 Ed.)

Sr. Mary M. McGlone, “May 2, 2021, Fifth Sunday of Easter”, National Catholic Reporter. https://www.ncronline.org/sunday-resource/may-2-2021-fifth-sunday-easter

Art

Image: Hermanoleon clipart. http://www.textweek.com/yearb/easterb5.htm

Jan Richardson. “Beloved Is Where We Begin.” https://www.janrichardsonimages.com/

Caravaggio. “The Conversion of St. Paul.” Web Gallery of Art. https://www.wga.hu/index\_search.html

Dan Cristian. Image of grapevine. [dan-cristian-padure-XwqWU1HcM6s-unsplash CROP.jpg](https://www.ncronline.org/file/dan-cristian-padure-xwqwu1hcm6s-unsplash-cropjpg)

Final Blessing

the Revised Common Lectionary, a service of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library. https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=90

Music

Opening Song. “Sing a New Song unto the Lord”, Glory To God The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminister John Know Press (First Ed. 2013)

Closing Song. “I’m Gonna Live So god Can Use Me”, Glory To God The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminister John Know Press (First Ed. 2013)