

Homily: 5th Sunday of Easter: Cycle B: 2015: Acts 9: 26-31; Ps. 22; 1 Jn 3: 18-24; Jn 15: 1-8

“Bearing good spiritual fruit in the fear of Lord”

1. In the first reading from Acts, we hear about **two different types of fear**. **One** is the fear of Saul (later St. Paul) when he first converted and the other Christians didn't believe it and thought it was a ruse to get them, and the other fear *is the fear of the Lord*. When we think of the emotion or response of fear in our lives, we usually think of it as it is on a human level which is: *a state of dread or a feeling of alarm or disquiet caused by an awareness or expectation of danger*. This is the fear the disciples felt toward Saul when he came to Jerusalem for the first time after his conversion event on the road to Damascus - where he was going to persecute the new Christians. The reaction of the Christians toward him at first was natural - they were afraid of him because of his past actions. It took a while for them to warm up to Saul and his change of heart. On the other hand we also hear in Acts today at the end of the section of a **second** type of fear, it says that *the Church was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord*. **What does the fear of the Lord mean?** The fear of the Lord, if properly understood, is not a state of dread or feeling of alarm in the presence of the all holy God, but *rather a respect and love for the Lord and His ways*.
2. This leads to the second reading from St. John the Evangelist which tells us ***not to love simply in word or speech, but rather in deed and truth***. St. John is saying, it is one thing to say we love God and neighbor, but the true test is if we live it in our daily deeds. We must become disciples of the Lord and not mere spectators. As Jesus puts it so well at the end of the Gospel passage today, *“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”* It's a process of growing in discipleship - it's not automatic; e.g., just because we come to Mass on a regular basis doesn't mean we are automatically the Lord's disciples. The question is in that regard: *are we a disciple or just a spectator?* St. John says to become a disciple, or a true follower of the Lord, we need to have **confidence** in God's strength and mercy to help us live our Catholic faith well on a daily level, rooted in that profound respect (holy fear) for Him. By keeping His commandments, which includes both the Ten Commandments and the teaching of our Catholic faith in all areas of life, we show

our love for God and neighbor. We then remain in Him and He in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us in the Sacrament of Baptism and who remains with us to mold us more and more into the image of Jesus, as long as we don't turn away from the Lord though **deliberate mortal sin.**

3. If we have a proper fear or reverence for the Lord and show it by striving always daily to follow Him in love by keeping His commandments, then **we will truly be a branch on the vine of the Lord's family which is the Church.** As Jesus says, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.*" Living in God's friendship or the state of grace is the greatest gift in this life because it will lead to eternal friendship with God. That is why the saints always say in their writings: *avoid serious or mortal sin at all costs, even if it means giving up your earthly life!* That seems extreme if we don't understand the gift that God's life in our souls truly is: *the beginning of eternal union with the Blessed Trinity.* This gift of God's life increases in our souls more and more as we grow in our faith and receive the Sacraments with love, gratitude, and humility. **The greatest aid to our spiritual growth is Holy Communion,** where we literally receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus our Savior, and where Jesus is, so also is the Father and the Holy Spirit – so the Trinity's life increases in us. That is also why each time before we receive Holy Communion we need to examine our conscience to make sure we are not in mortal (serious) sin, because in that case instead of Holy Communion helping us, it will hurt us spiritually (see 1 Corth 11: 27-32) because we first need to be reconciled to Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. All this ties into the gift of the fear of the Lord, which gives us proper reverence for God and the things of God. **In all honesty, if we have that proper fear or reverence for the Lord we would never even think of receiving Him in Holy Communion in a state of serious sin before going to the Sacrament of Confession!** Once that holy reverence is rooted in us, then the Father will purify us even further to enable us to reflect Jesus more and more in all that *we say and think and do.* This is what Jesus is referring to in the Gospel today when He says, *My Father is the vine grower. He*

takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit (people who remain obstinately in mortal sin), *and every one that does He prunes* (through the mystery of the Cross) *so that it bears more fruit.* In the end whether we remain in the Lord or not will determine where we end up, in eternity. The branches that are cut off will be burned up in the fire (Hell); while the ones who remain in the Lord Jesus will bear spiritual fruit, as He says elsewhere in the Gospel, thirty, sixty or one hundred fold (see **Mark 4:20**). May we always remain in the Lord's friendship by holding Him and His teaching in holy reverence, and with His help, live it on a daily basis more and more generously. Then we will truly become His disciples and glorify the Father. May we also humbly ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware when we sin, especially in a serious way, so that with His help we can regularly confess our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, repent, and change like Saul, and so live in the truth of the Lord's Light as opposed to the darkness and spiritual fog of a life cut off from Jesus. Remember Saul became Saint Paul; may we one day hear our names called out by the Lord Jesus with the title Saint in front of it! God bless you.

Recommended Reading:

The Fire Within. Fr. Thomas Dubay, S.M. Ignatius Press. 1989. (It truly is one of the best books I have come across in explaining how God wants to draw us into deeper union with Him through His divine indwelling in our souls, by grace, and by living the Gospel generously in daily life. Check it out.).