

5th Sunday of Easter B



Our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active. (1 Jn 3:18)

First Reading

Acts 9:26-31

When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple. Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to the apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to Saul and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. But after he had spoken to the Hellenists, and argued with them, they became determined to kill him. When the brothers knew, they took him to Caesarea, and sent him off from there to Tarsus.

The churches throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria were now left in peace, building themselves up, living in the fear of the Lord, and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Second Reading

1 John 3:18-24

My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active; only by this can we be certain that we are the children of the truth and be able to quieten our conscience in his presence, whatever accusations it may raise against us, because God is greater than our conscience and he knows everything. My dear people, if we cannot be condemned by our own conscience, we need not be afraid in God's presence, and whatever we ask him, we shall receive, because we keep his commandments and live the kind of life that he wants. His commandments are these: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as he told us to. Whoever keeps his commandments lives in God and God lives in him. We know that he lives in us by the Spirit that he has given us.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples."

Meditation

At the beginning of the second discourse after the Last Supper, Jesus says, "I am the true vine!" When he makes such an unprecedented remark, does he have in mind that vine carved in stone on the temple pediment to symbolize Israel? The image fits well within the context of the Last Supper, where Jesus has just given his disciples the wine of the new covenant prefigured at Cana. In any case, it would evoke in the hearts of the disciples the whole history of the relationship between God and the chosen people. Sign of blessing, symbol of the fruitful wife, the vine is present throughout the life of this people who are attached to the land. God could rightly expect fine grapes from the luxuriant vine uprooted from Egypt and planted in Canaan. He had lavished so much care on it! But he received only sour grapes in return. In the words of the prophets, the vine came to signify the sinful and degenerate Israel, unfaithful to the covenant and about to be punished for its perversity. Later hope is reborn for a magnificent vine, a purified and faithful people for whom the Lord would be the guardian, day and night. "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-grower." Jesus at last fulfils the divine expectation which has so long been frustrated. He is, in his person, the true Israel, and his blood has brought forth a new vine on Calvary. Henceforth, none can bear fruit for God unless they are in Jesus, and Jesus in them, in a reciprocity of love which alone assures life its fruitfulness. "You in me ... I in you": that is the refrain of this discourse, the marvellous promise which the eucharist already begins to fulfil.