

Homily 5th Sunday in Eastertide 2024

Reading today's Gospel from St John my thoughts turned to years spent in Italy and the meticulous care taken by the workers of the vineyards as they looked after the vines throughout the entire year. It is indeed a constant labour of love.

First, there is the pruning of the vine in Dec/January. Once daily temperatures reach around 10 deg Celsius in March buds occur and this is a period when the vinedresser must protect the trees from cold and hail. The vinedresser will also control the shoot direction and number of shoots, cutting away the weakest. A grapevine pollinates and flowering *occurs around May*. *By the Summer* the vines start to develop hard, little berries and at this point the wine maker will choose to allow the best grapes to ripen fully, or to *green harvest when the she/he* drops any underdeveloped or unwanted grapes to further fertilise the ground. Once a grape has physically matured, it will start to change colour. This process is called veraison and occurs in July/August. Once a decision is made to harvest, usually late Summer, it is generally a nonstop process that can last *6 weeks and sometimes longer*. In Autumn, after harvest, you get fields of beautiful yellow and orange leaves. The leaves will begin to fall off and the wood begins to harden from green to brown. In Dec/Jan the pruning and dormancy cycle repeats itself. Patiently waiting for bud break in the Spring.

In the Old Testament the imagery of the fruitful "Vine" or the "Vineyard" is used as a symbol for Israel as Yahweh's Covenant people. This is important to understand Jesus' teaching of the "True Vine" in St John. All Israelites and Jews understood that to be ethnically Israelite is to be identified as part of "The Vine" of Yahweh. In the Old Testament when the Covenant People of Israel/Judah fell into sin and became disobedient to the Covenant which Yahweh had made with them on Mt. Sinai, God sent His holy prophets to call a Covenant Lawsuit, in Hebrew a "riv," against The Chosen People. As a result of their disobedience and violation of the covenant, the blessings of the Covenant became punishments and curses, such as when The Chosen People were sent into The Great 70 Year Exile in Babylonia.

In John's Last Supper Narratives Jesus identifies **Himself**, not Judah/Israel, as the genuine "True Vine" who will establish a New and everlasting Covenant by his Passion, Death and Resurrection. No more need of curses nor condemnation. Jesus instead ransoms us from sin and death by the spilling of his blood. The New Covenant Law is no longer dependant on a set of rules and regulations but is a law of love of God and love of neighbour, in which one's neighbour is defined as every member of the human family, a law of freedom. This is the Covenant we celebrate at Mass.

Just as the modern vinedresser lovingly throughout the entire year tends to the vine, so God the Father looks after Jesus the 'true vine' and as 'branches' constantly and lovingly looks after us. Even during periods of suffering and pain God is gently pruning, protecting or cutting us back to ensure that we produce a fruitful and plentiful harvest. God makes sure that even our discarded imperfections and anxieties are transformed into spiritual fertiliser to help our growth in faith. The work in God's Vineyard is without a doubt The Father, Son and Holy Spirit's true labour of LOVE to produce the best wine possible!!