

# THE EMMAUS SERIES

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year B

Acts 9:26

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

### *A fruitful life through the Paschal Mystery*

Today's gospel reading, 'I am the true vine', brings us another of John's 'I AM' meditations. It takes up an important theme developed by the Old Testament prophets and one of the psalms: the old Israel was Yahweh's 'vine', lovingly planted and tended; but it brought forth only bitter fruits. In Jesus, however, this divine project has been taken up again by the Father – coming forth from his Paschal Mystery, he is the true vine which will bear fruits which give eternal 'glory' to the Father.

Thus our liturgy carries forward our Easter reflection upon what the Saviour's Paschal Mystery means in our lives and in the life of the Church. One of the central themes of the New Testament is the solidarity we have with Christ through what was achieved by God through his death and resurrection. For Paul we live 'in Christ', we are 'limbs of his body'. John often repeats that Christ (and his Father) now 'dwell' or 'make their home' in us.

We could easily overlook the fact that what comes through clearly in this gospel is the call to fruitfulness – sharing with the Son all that makes him the 'true' vine, beloved of the Father who has given him over for the sake of the whole world. The vine's branches are 'pruned' by the Father by means of 'the word' – a clear call to nourish our Resurrection life through a knowledge and love of the Scriptures. The fruits we will bear are primarily the witness we must give to others, and the outreach through which we are called to embody the Saviour's presence in our world. Israel was called to be 'a light to the nations' but failed; the New Israel, brought into existence through our solidarity with Jesus in his Paschal Mystery, must fulfil that great mission – an apparently impossible task, until we recall that what is at stake is the Father's great design in creation, and we recognise that all that is to be achieved derives from the One who is 'the true vine'.

In the first reading from Acts, the story of the apostolic Church, energised by its Resurrection faith, continues. The conversion of Paul – through his meeting with the Risen Lord - is a great turning point in this story. As now, the difficulties to be overcome, if the community of believers was to bear life-giving fruits, were both internal and external. It was not easy to accept and trust as a brother the man who had been so violent against them. And the message of life - brought to a lost world - was hated by those who preferred darkness to the light.

If the fruits of life 'in the vine' stressed in the gospel are the Church's effective witness and outreach, the 'discipleship' referred to at the end of the gospel's teaching brings great personal blessings to each believer. The reading from John's letter spells out some of them: learning from the Saviour what authentic 'love' is; finding the trust in God which overcomes all our deepest fears and self-doubts; the unspeakable privilege of the divine indwelling; and finally the gift of God's own Spirit.

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