

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - B

Today the gospel reading is from Jesus' discourse with his disciples after the Last Supper. The reading begins with another of those 'I am...' statements. Last week Jesus said 'I am the good shepherd', this week 'I am the true vine.' Jesus says we have been grafted on to him by the word he has spoken which we have accepted. The example of the vine should encourage us and help us to realise that we are all one in Christ. It is vine which feeds the branches which in turn must bear fruit. In the first reading, from Acts, a new disciple, Saul, appears on the scene and in the second reading we have a repetition of earlier teaching, believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and we must love one another.

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, Acts 9.26-31, the new disciple Saul (Paul) returns to Jerusalem after his conversion on the road to Damascus, his baptism and after spending three years in Arabia and Damascus according to his letter to the Galatians, Gal.1.17-18. The disciples are naturally very suspicious of him due to his past record, but Barnabas introduces him, explains Saul's conversion and how he spoke out boldly in Damascus, that Jesus is the Christ. So Paul, a much more educated man than the Apostles, joined the apostolic group, and with them preached fearlessly. He got into arguments with the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews), who decided to kill Saul so the disciples sent him back to his home town Tarsus in SE Turkey. The reading ends with the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoying a period of peace which incidentally shows the growth of the Church from Jerusalem.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 21.26-28,30-32, is a prayer of those close to God who have to suffer and yet have hope. The upright man, the psalm says, will carry out his vows and a possible reference to the messianic banquet where the poor are satisfied. Then a prayer of confidence, it is those who seek the Lord who render him praise. In the second verse it is all peoples of the world who return to the Lord and worship him, as a result of the sufferings of the faithful servant. And the final verse is a confident prayer, 'my soul shall live for him' and his children will declare all that the Lord has done; a good response to the spread of the gospel in the first reading.

The **Second Reading** is taken from the first letter of St John. There are three letters attributed to John the first being the most important, possibly written at the same time as the gospel. This letter was written to the Christian communities of Asia (Turkey) because they were suffering near disintegration due to some early heresies which were afflicting the Church. In the introduction the writer says he wants to share what he has 'seen and heard', his experiences, with his readers. He picks out three main points 1. To live in the light of Christ and he lists four conditions to live such a life. 2. To live as God's children with three conditions necessary, and 3. He speaks of the source of love and faith. Love is from God so we must love, and faith in Christ Jesus is necessary to overcome the world. The letter ends with two supplementary points.

The reading, 3.18-24, is again from the section where we are asked to live as God's children and keep the commandments, especially that of love. It is no good just saying we must love God and our neighbour, our love must be alive and active, 'this will be the proof that we belong to God.' We need not fear God or fear going against our conscience if we keep God's commandments and live our lives accordingly. Again we are reminded what these commandments are: 'that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we should love each other as he has commanded us.' If we keep the commandments then God lives in us and we live in him. It is the Spirit given to all of us which makes this possible; a repetitive lesson but one that puts meaning into the Resurrection which we are celebrating in Eastertide.

