

5th Sunday of Easter - B

One of the ways that I have benefited personally from the opportunity to study theology is that, at some point along the way, I discovered that there is more than one way of praying the act of contrition.

That was a revelation, and very freeing, because I had always struggled with the wording of the act of contrition that I learned in grade school, especially the part that goes “I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to sin no more.”

The fact that I was there in the confessional meant that I did, indeed, have a desire to be freed from my sinful habits, but I knew full well that many of the sins I had confessed were sins that I had confessed before, in spite of the “firm resolution” I had made.

At some point I felt like there had to be a way out of what had become a vicious circle.

Today’s Gospel provided some help. For one thing, it focuses not so much on the morality of this or that action but on an abiding reality and relationship.

In using the image of the vine and branches Jesus puts the point across that the essential thing is that we stay in communion with him, and through him, with God the Father.

This is so important that communion at Mass is the high point to which the entire liturgy of the Eucharist builds. Can you imagine going to Mass, only to have the priest go straight from the Eucharistic prayer to putting the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

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We would feel pretty cheated if that happened, wouldn't we? It would save a lot of time, but that's not why we come to Mass.

Working on staying in communion, abiding in God, has a different flavor to it. It's not as focused on external actions as it is on what's going on inside of me.

It makes the Christian life less about me as the primary actor and more about being a conduit through which God acts in the world. It moves to the forefront the awareness that God has a desire for the world and that desire is like the sap flowing through the branches of a grape vine.

We don't have to create God's desire, we just have to be open to letting it flow through us, and in doing so, we find our desire gets activated as well.

This is very important—that we get in touch with how we desire the things that God desires. When we go that route, we experience freedom to be our best selves and our capacity for being vessels for God's love and desire increases.

If we get stuck in the mindset of keeping a score card of all the times we've screwed up, it's hard to avoid the tendency to either give up altogether, or to “ride the brake” out of fear of making a mistake or doing something wrong.

The practice of abiding in God's love does require a change in how we go about praying, I think. It becomes less about getting prayers said—unless that's

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how you keep your mind focused on abiding in God—and more about opening up to God’s desire for the world. We may have to make more time for asking God what he wants for us and for all his creatures. And abiding in what we have come to know can’t help but orient our priorities toward seeing that those things come about.

We become branches full of sap from the vine of God’s love and producing an abundant harvest—one that’s often surprising to us because we did not know what we had within us.

Living from that reality might mean that when we approach the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, and make our act of contrition, it might come out more like this:

“Father, I have sinned and injured my ability to be a vessel of your grace. I commit myself again today to the work of abiding in you so that your love may flow through me out into the world. Amen.”

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1. From my study of theology I discovered that there was more than one way of praying the act of contrition.

A revelation, and very freeing; I had always struggled with the wording of the one I learned growing up, especially with “I firmly resolve...to sin no more.

That had not worked. There I was in the confessional in spite of my “firm resolution.”

A vicious circle.

2. Today’s Gospel a help; focuses on an abiding reality and relationship rather than on this or that action

The image of the vine and branches points out the essential thing: that we stay in communion with Jesus, and through him, with God the Father.

So important that communion at Mass becomes the high point of the entire liturgy of the Eucharist.

Can you imagine going to Mass only to have the priest go straight from the Eucharistic prayer to putting the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle?

A great time saver, but totally misses the point.

3. Abiding in God, staying in communion has a different flavor to it than being focused on external actions
 - Focused on what’s going on inside me.
 - Makes the Christian life more about being a conduit through which God acts in the world.

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- Moves to the forefront the awareness that God has a desire for the world; that desire is like sap flowing through the branches of a grape vine.

Don't have to create God's desire; just have to be open to letting it flow through us. In the process our desire gets activated

A very important point: that we get in touch with how we desire the things that God desires.

Going that route leads to freedom to be our best selves and increasing our capacity for being vessels of God's love

4. What works against that: keeping a score card of all the times we've screwed up

Then the tendency is to either give up, or "ride the brake." Fear ends up running the show.

5. Abiding in God's love affects how we pray: it becomes less about getting prayers said and more about keeping our mind focused on abiding in God

More about opening up to God's desire for the world.

We will have to make more time for asking God what he wants for us and for all his creatures

6. A new act of contrition: "Father, I have sinned and injured my ability to be a vessel of your grace. I commit myself again today to the work of abiding in you so that your love may flow through me out into the world. Amen."