

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - B 2

I recently celebrated my 33 anniversary of ordination to the diaconate which took place at St. Peter's Basilica.

After I graduated from college seminary at St. Meinrad's in southern Indiana I was sent by Bishop Grutka to study at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

Dominating the hilltop campus overlooking Vatican City is the chapel, the very heart of the life and work of men studying to become priests.

When you enter the chapel your eyes are immediately drawn to the back wall of the sanctuary which features an enormous mosaic of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, to whom the Chapel is dedicated.

The chapel is filled with other beautiful works of art including Stations of the Cross made by the most famous Italian bronze sculptor of the twentieth century.

There are also *bas* reliefs of the "eight" sacraments, with the eighth one being "preaching," by which the words of Christ are made actual and efficacious in the lives of believers.

But while the eyes of most first-time visitors to the Chapel heads look up and around with wonder, the most important symbolic imagery of all is under their feet.

At first glance one sees a floor of polished marble in which some pieces are dark reddish purple while others are brown and bright green.

2

As you look more carefully the colors seems to fall into an interweaving pattern throughout the main body of the chapel where the pews are.

These interwoven colors converge in the sanctuary the floor under the altar is totally dark marble.

This complex pattern is meant to represent today's Gospel of the vine and the branches.

Christ is the vine and we are the branches.

Everything starts from Christ in the sanctuary, from his gift of himself of his Body and Blood.

His life-giving presence flows out into the branches - those sitting in the pews - and from those branches out into the world.

This powerful symbolism declares that Christ alone is the source of the North American College's vitality.

And Christ alone is the source of the Church's fruitfulness.

Just as a branch receives nourishment by being connected to the vine, so we receive our spiritual nourishment by being connected to Jesus.

That's the secret to ensure that our life is not wasted but, in fact, makes a great difference for the coming of God's kingdom.

This "connection" began when we were baptized, and has been nurtured within our families.

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Through daily prayer, reading the Scriptures, life-long faith Formation of various kinds, and participating in the Mass, Jesus has become essential to our life.

But, it is by receiving Jesus in the Holy Communion that we are given the most important opportunity by which we "remain" in Jesus and he "remains" in us.

It is in and through the Holy Eucharist that Jesus wants to literally remain in us so that, strengthened by his True Presence in our soul, we can become transformed to become more like him.

However, personal union with Jesus is not enough. As a branch growing from the vine Jesus wants each of us to bear fruit.

St. John puts it quite bluntly in today's second reading: "Children, let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and truth."

In other words, we can't just say that we believe in Jesus, we have to put that belief into practice.

And how do we do this?

We've heard it again and again throughout the Easter season: by living according to the commandments and, especially, by loving others as Jesus has loved us.

It is by loving God and loving others that we witness to the presence and power of the Risen Lord in our lives.

Apart from Jesus we can do nothing, but with Jesus - and each other - we will bear great fruit.