

Homily
5EasterB
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St. Bernard Church
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Some of the major themes in the Bible are about things we consume, things that are edible.

So of course there is the theme of bread, starting with the manna in the desert, the bread of the Passover meal, the bread of the Last Supper, the Eucharistic bread of the Mass.

Then there is the theme of the wine, which starts in the Old Testament with the blood covenant and reaches its ultimate meaning with the blood pouring out of the side of Jesus and made available to us in the Mass through the consecration.

In today's Gospel we have another theme about something we consume, something we can eat, and that's fruit.

The theme of fruit starts in the story of creation in Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis. On the 3rd day, God said, "Let the earth bring forth...every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it."

In the very next chapter of Genesis, Chapter 2, we hear more about fruit. God tells Adam that he is not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that if he eats this fruit he will surely die.

We know what happens next. Adam's wife, Eve, takes some of the forbidden fruit from the tree, eats it, and offers some to Adam, and he eats it.

Now let's fast forward to the New Testament. In the Gospel of Luke, Mary is told by the Angel Gabriel that she will conceive and give birth to a son by the power of the Holy Spirit and that this child will be the Son of God. Mary gives her consent to this. She becomes pregnant and in the early days of her pregnancy, she goes to visit her relative, Elizabeth, who is also expecting a child.

When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, she is filled with the Holy Spirit and cries out, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Of course, the fruit of Mary's womb is Jesus.

Jesus speaks about himself as fruit in John 12 when He says:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

This is the seed principle, that each of us produces fruit by sacrificing ourselves for Jesus and for others, putting the needs of others ahead of our needs.

I've seen paintings of Jesus from several centuries ago in which, in one of the corners of the painting, there's a pomegranate, just stuck there, not in a bowl or anything. What's that all about?

The pomegranate is a rich symbol of the fruitfulness of the suffering and death of Jesus. If you open a pomegranate, it is filled with an average of 600 seeds, all of which are encased in bright red pulp, symbolizing that the blood of Jesus is the seed of spiritual life for all who believe in Him and obey Him.

The most basic, fundamental decision we will ever make in life basically comes down to a choice between two women. Each of these women is offering us fruit.

Eve offers us the fruit of control, greed, power, prestige, pride, independence and arrogance. Mary offers us the fruit of humility, meekness, surrender and obedience. Jesus describes the fruit of Mary when He lists the beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted.

Mary herself talks about how God throws down the rulers from their thrones and lifts up the lowly.

In the spiritual dimension of life, fruitfulness comes from being and doing the opposite of what the world tells us we should be and do. This is why Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that fruitfulness might require pruning, because to be fruitful we have to take the hard road of resisting so much of what the world values.

Even Saint Paul had to be pruned, which he talks about in 2 Corinthians 12. He says, so that he would not be too prideful, God sent him a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan, to beat him. Paul says that he begged God to relieve him from this suffering, but God said to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

What this means is that when we are weak, we acknowledge that we need God and it is then that He reveals His power.

Here's what it comes down to.

We can be the kind of person who sends the message to everyone, “Look what I’ve done.”

Or we can be the kind of person who lives by faith in what God can do for us.

If we’re going to focus on our own achievement, our own accomplishments, and the so-called things of this world, we are not going to be spiritually fruitful.

On the other hand, if we focus on what God wants from us, and we try to do His will in all things, and if we’re willing to give Him all the credit, we will be spiritually fruitful.

If we have that kind of humility, Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel that we can ask for whatever we want in order to serve God faithfully and it will be done for us. God’s power will be made perfect in our weakness. We will be living the life we were created to live, and, as Jesus says at the end of today’s Gospel, the Father will be glorified. And that will be more than enough for us.