

Baccalaureate Mass
May 16, 2013
St. Ignatius Church

The gospel you selected is indicative of your awareness of the challenge facing you as you leave the Hilltop: becoming who you are. This may seem paradoxical. If we already are, whence the need to become?

This Gospel challenge is familiar to any parent, teacher, or friend; as in: “you know better than that” or “you’re an A student doing C work” or “you’re bigger than what you did to him.” We are not always our best selves and others may see this more clearly than we do. Coaches often have a better sense of what an athlete can do than the player herself. We gratefully acknowledge at this liturgy all those – parents and loved ones – who believed in you from infancy and who invested in you in ways that you may just now begin to appreciate.

To understand the Gospel metaphor of the vine and branches is to accept an understanding of ourselves that is not self-evident. Jesus’ image of the vine and branches speaks to our radical connectedness to each other in God. The truth is that we are intimately united with one another and with God. In God’s eyes there is no “them,” only “us.” We are not isolated individuals, each walking a separate path. The vine/branches metaphor speaks to the ties that bind us to one another and God. Thus the poet reminds us that no human being is an island entire unto himself and Paul’s teaching that we are all the members of one body with many different parts.

We are so intimately interconnected to each other that it is impossible to separate us from one another and from God, the source of our life – as impossible as separating a vine from its branches. Jesus/God-among-us/Emanu-el is not the trunk or the stalk but the vine, the whole plant; we are the branches. Stop and figure out where the vine ends and the branch begins. It can’t be done and that’s the point.

God has blended divinity with humanity in Jesus and in each of us. When it comes to goodness, where God ends and we begin cannot be pinned down. Is the good we do from God or from us? The answer: “yes.” The Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, “I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am.” Jesus showed us that living his life of selfless love is living God’s life. Divinity/God is accessed and manifested through our humanity: “Remain in me as I remain in you ... Those who remain in me will bear much fruit ... Remain in my love.” Are we living God’s life now?

We might prefer a God way up in the clouds rather than Emanuel – God-with-us. The God of Jesus is closer than the person sitting next to you. Try as we might to put distance between ourselves and God, the Gospel leaves no doubt that God is nearer to us than we would ever dare to imagine. The God of Moses and Jesus does not ask for ritual sacrifice, elaborate liturgies or rote formulaic prayer. God asks only that we remain in his love so that God’s joy may be ours and our joy may be complete. God asks only – it’s a big only – that we love one another as God

loved us in Jesus. To love selflessly is to live God's very life. It is to be at once human and divine – that's who we are.

Our challenge is to live God's life through our life; to realize our humanity, at its best, is God living in us and with us and through us. This Godly life bears lasting fruit and for this we are chosen. Will Rogers characterized the life that so many pursue in his wry observation that "too many people spend money they haven't earned to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like. That's not a human life, that's the rat race, and as Lily Tomlin said, "The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still the rat." We are not rats. We are graced beings; we are the bearers of divinity within our humanity.

In Jesus, God offers us his own life rather than the proverbial "rat race. " God offers us a full, rich, satisfying life -- not an idyllic life devoid of pain and suffering. God's call to love one another is the fully human way to be in the world; to be otherwise is to fail to be who we truly are: graced people chosen and appointed by God to love one another as God loves us.

"Change the world from here" is more than a catchy marketing slogan. It is an act of faith and hope in you and the God who dwells within you and moves you from deep within to heal our broken world; the God who with your hands would feed the hungry, comfort the sorrowing, welcome the immigrant, and heal the sick.

We pray that you will live that life and come to know the joy that only God can give and you will be with God now and forever.