

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year B)
Sunday May 9th 2021

In today's Gospel reading, which is a part of the speech he makes to his friends at The Last Supper - so immediately before his arrest and crucifixion - Jesus tells them that he has chosen them to be his friends; he has commissioned them, his friends, to go out and bear fruit that will last. Whatever different places life may lead them to, whatever different circumstances they find themselves in, one thing is constant: as friends of Jesus Christ they are to live lives that are fruitful. The very same thing applies to us: if we are going to live up to the wonderful calling of being a friend of Jesus Christ, the very nature of that friendship is to be fruitful.

Given that this is clearly something fundamental to life as a friend of Christ, we might want to reflect for a few moments on what it might mean to live a fruitful life: what does a fruitful life look like? Here are some thoughts that we could explore on this.

Fruitfulness starts from receptiveness. No plant can bear fruit all alone, it must first be pollinated: it must receive before it can be fruitful. The same is true of us. We cannot simply decide to be fruitful and expect that alone to be enough. Fruitful living begins outside me, it begins with me being open and receptive. When Jesus tells his friends to be fruitful, they must first receive from him the means to do this. An apple tree does not get to choose what fruit it will bear; it cannot carry oranges – but it might carry a good harvest of apples or a poor one. If I am going to live a fruitful life I need to understand my circumstances and my limitations. There are some opportunities that are open to me, and there are some which are not. Fruitful living needs to start with receptiveness, with self-awareness, with an alertness to the very real opportunities that lie open to me, and an awareness of the ones that are not mine. As the apple cannot choose to bear oranges, I cannot decide to step outside those possibilities that lie before me. I cannot choose to be a great footballer or a great actor or a politician; but there are things that I can do, things that can bear fruit. Fruitfulness begins with receptiveness, with an honest self-knowledge that allows me to see myself as God has made me, and to receive both the gifts that he has for me and the opportunities to use them. Who am I really? What gifts and opportunities have I been given to use them? There can be no fruitful living without this.

The fruit always follows the flower. Someone is sure to correct my science here, but as a general rule at least fruit springs from a flower. The vine blossoms, and from the blossom springs the grape. The fruitful life that we are all called to live cannot begin until the flower has first appeared: no flower, no fruit. The flower, the enticing thing of beauty, from which a fruitful life flows is Love. St John says today 'God is Love', and so a fruitful life cannot exist without love. Love is the multiplier that can turn ordinary actions into truly fruitful events. Just before telling the disciples to live fruitful lives, Jesus tells them to remain in his love. So when we ask ourselves what a fruitful life looks like, it will be one where love blossoms. It begins with the acceptance of God's love, because only the person that knows how much

they are loved can dare to love fully, but then it becomes a life powered by love: that is to say, a fruitful life is one that is motivated by the desire, in fact more than the desire, the passion, to make more complete, more true, more real the lives of others. The fruitful life puts other people in touch with reality so that they can experience a fuller sort of life. For the apostles, of course, this meant preaching the Gospel: a fruitful life, for them, was one in which they introduced other people to friendship with Christ. There may be, for all of us, moments when this is our calling: to bear fruit in introducing people to Christ. That was certainly what the saints that went before us in every age believed. But there are many other ways in which we can live fruitful lives. If we listen to someone, really listen and hear, when they have troubles to share, and give them an abundance of our time; if we show gentle kindness to someone, especially if they are feeling a lack of kindness; if we manage to stop ourselves speaking harshly; if we are able to do things, however small they may seem, that make someone feel good; and if occasionally we have to say to someone something that they may not wish to hear but we do it with gentleness and humility then we are living fruitfully.

Is my life a fruitful one? Will people say about me 'he is good to have around, he really makes a difference to me? Do I help people to feel good, and to feel that life is good (except for those rare occasions when, with humility and kindness, I must say things that make them for a while feel bad, until a new balance is found)? Have I been Christ in this situation, in this place, in this encounter, in this need?

It is the flavour of the fruit that matters in the long run, not its size or even its look. Some fruit can look amazing, but simply have no taste at all. The fruitful life may not look much at first sight, may not be very dramatic or earth-shattering, but its effects may go very deep. The fruitfulness of a life is measured in its impact on the hearts of other people, not in how loud or obvious it is. The one who chooses to live fruitfully may not know how successful they have been, but still they carry on. Perhaps the results will only be obvious in the life to come when a crowd, hopefully a large one, of souls whose lives have been made richer by us will joyfully welcome us to Paradise.

'I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last'.