

Easter 6B (5/17/09 – *Christ Abides in You – and You in Him*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

*Christ Abides in You – and You in Him.* In some ways this theme and sermon title appears to be not very different from what we heard last Sunday – about Christ the True Vine ... and how we are joined to Christ in His Death and Resurrection by Word and Sacrament. Today's *Holy Gospel* is also tied to what we heard two Sundays ago – on *Good Shepherd Sunday*; for here in our text ... on the night in which He was betrayed ... our Savior-Shepherd says: ***Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends ... I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*** [JN 15.13-15] Christ Jesus has laid down His life and made us His friends ... friends of God ... reconciled to God despite our sins by which we make ourselves enemies of God ... reconciled also to one another.

Today's Word of God is, in a sense, primarily about us Christians – or better said, primarily about the relationship of us Christians to Christ ... and what that means for us ... how we should understand ourselves. *Christ Abides in You – and You in Him.*

And I will be quite upfront in a couple of things. First, any Christian – no matter where s/he comes from – is hugely mistaken to think and say “I have chosen (or decided) to follow Jesus.” Christ says it's mistaken in so many words in our text: ***You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*** [JN 15.16]. It may seem that way sometimes – especially when we compare ourselves to the world ... that has rejected Christ. But, interestingly, the opposite of rejecting the Kingdom of God is **not** choosing Christ ... but **being** chosen **by** Christ to be in His Kingdom. The grammar checkers will flag this every time. “Don't use the passive if you can help it,” my English teacher would say, “The passive is weak.” True enough ... and precisely so – the passive is weak. And that is **just** what we are – if even we attain to such weakness! Most of the time our sinful flesh is actively rebelling against God and His holy will – too proud to be chosen (passively) ... too strong-headed to be submissive to Christ and His commands ... too independent to be subject to Christ and His love. That's our sinful flesh!

Take the example of Christ's ***commandment, that you love one another as He has loved you*** [15.12]. *I will love whom I wish and how I wish ... and some I will love not at all.* That's our sinful flesh. There are people we find it very difficult – **impossible** – to love. But Christ says that we are to ***love one another as He has loved us.*** And even when we **do** love, it is quite often more because of what **we** get out of it than out of the self-sacrificial giving that we see and receive in Christ

our Lord. For those who are able to attend *Perry & Connie's* wedding next Sunday evening – and you're all invited! – you will hear more about this self-sacrificial love in the context of marriage. But it is something that we **all** need to hear ... and know ... and put into practice. *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments.* [1JN 5.1-2] That's how the Apostle and Evangelist, St. John – the disciple who characterizes himself in his Gospel account as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* [21.7] – puts it in our *Epistle*. We need to self-sacrificially love our fellow Christians ... self-sacrificially love our spouses and families ... indeed, we need to self-sacrificially love our neighbors – just as Christ our dear Lord has loved us and the whole world of sinners.

That is, in particular, one fruit that we should bear in our Christians lives as we abide in Christ. So how are you doing at that? Perhaps not as well as you would like? Not as well as you ought? Maybe better than others ... better than most, but certainly not *as CHRIST has loved you* – and that's the standard by which we will all be judged ... an absolute, perfect standard. There is no curve here ... no grade inflation. Oh ... and don't forget, that love – that self-sacrificial love – is to extend **also** to your enemies ... those who hate you and your family and your Church and your faith ... hate even your Lord. **That's** what Christ says: *I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven* [MT 5.44-45]. **That's** how **CHRIST** has loved – that He might make His enemies His friends by means of His Cross and Empty Tomb. Show no partiality – like God – since **all** ... including **you yourself** ... are condemned under sin and **none** is righteous before God on his own account ... **none** bears fruit as he ought ... **none** loves as he ought. Show no partiality: love spouse ... love family ... love fellow Christian ... love neighbor ... love enemy – and fear, love, and trust in God above **all** things.

*How?*, you ask, *How can I do all that?* Simply: **in Christ**. That's the way ... the only way. Abide in Christ's love – the love He has from the Father with which He in turns loves you. And this is an astounding thing, when we pay attention to it. Our Lord says: *JUST AS the Father loved Me, I also loved you.* This is a love that is eternal, as Jeremiah records: *The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you."* [JER 31.3] The eternal Father's love for the eternal Son is eternal ... complete ... perfect ... everlasting – and so is, then, the Son's love **for you** ... and for **all** people. That is the love of God you have in His Son! And God has promised that *neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other*

*created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* [ROM 8.38-39]. Abide in Christ's love and He – and the Father and the Holy Spirit – will abide in you.

But what does this mean, exactly, to abide in Christ? As we learned last Sunday – in our Lord's analogy of the Vine and the branches – it means being connected to Christ ... united to Christ by Word and Sacrament. As wild branches – sinful, enemy branches, in fact – Christ our dear Vine and Savior has grafted us into Himself. How, precisely? Christ tells us: *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends ... you are My friends* [JN 15.13-14]. Or, as our *Epistle* tells us: *This is He Who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the One Who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.* [1JN 5.6-8] Christ Jesus has grafted us into Himself by His incarnation – not **just** by becoming Flesh and dwelling among us ... but by what He **did** in His Flesh while among us. Christ has grafted us into Himself – caused us to abide in Him – by means of Baptism (His and ours) ... by means of the shedding of His Blood on the Cross ... and by means of pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us in Word and Sacrament to create and sustain living faith in us.

In Jesus' own Baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form to anoint Him with power, that He might faithfully keep the Father's commandments **in your stead and for your benefit** ... even to the point of death on the Cross – and the Father showed forth His everlasting love saying: *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased* [MT 3.17]. In **your** Baptism, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon you by means of the Word and promises God Himself has attached to Holy Baptism. And because of the Holy Spirit's work through the water and Word of Baptism, *now thus says the LORD, He Who created you ... He Who formed you ...: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine* [ISA 43.1]. By His Passion and Crucifixion, Christ your dear Savior shed His blood for the forgiveness of all your sins – for the forgiveness of **all** sins. It is the Blood of Christ that cleanses you from all sin and unrighteousness [1JN 1.7,9]. The same Blood – with the Body – given to you in the Holy Supper for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. And finally it is the Holy Spirit Who constantly bears witness to these glorious and blessed truths – to the incarnation of the Son of God ... to His glorious Baptism in the Jordan as He took upon Himself the sins of the world to bear them away to the Cross ... to the glory of His self-sacrificing love as He received the rejection and ridicule of His creation and the wrath and punishment against our sin from the Father ... to His bleeding, thorn-crowned brow, the nail-marked His hands and feet from which

streamed the life-giving blood of the Son of God, and the spear-pierced side from which flowed water and blood as the Savior even in death poured forth the love of the Father and His own love for the sacramental cleansing of sinners.

And this “trinitarian” witness of water, blood, and Spirit unanimously testifies of your abiding “trinitarian” blessing of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus Christ. The continuous and faithful witness of the Spirit in the waters of your Holy Baptism and in the Blood of the Sacrament testifies that *Christ Abides in You – and You in Him.*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]