

2024 B 5th Sunday of Easter April 28th

The readings for this Sunday are a stark reminder of how important it is to be **connected**. Everyone knows it's true. **It's not what you know, the cynic says, but WHO you know that makes the difference.** Unfortunately, in some cases that's true. In this competitive world, if you are looking for a job, and your mother's friend is a CEO of a company, then you are more likely to be considered for the job, aren't you? That's the way things are. It pays to be connected.

It's so important in life to have connections. If you don't have connections, then it's important to HAVE connections. Make prudent use of this adage: "It's not what you know but **WHO** you know." Today the question is **how connected you are?**

Once a terrorist, Saul now becomes Jesus' disciple. In our 1st reading from Acts we read, knowing Saul's background, the other disciples were in fear of him. But with Barnabas' connection with Saul, he was accepted among the disciples and their relationships have grown through personal encounters with the Lord and with one another. Furthermore, the missionary activity of the church expands, and the church grows. In the 2nd reading, John encourages the followers of Christ to love one another not only in word but in deed, in truth by actively engaging in relationship with one another.

The gospel today is once again about our **being connected with God. Jesus is uninterruptedly connected with his** Father in heaven. This relationship went far deeper than daily appointments. He was always aware of his father's presence. Listen to his words:

"The son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees his father doing. Whatever the father does the son does likewise" (Jn. 5:9). It's a picture of intimacy.

"I am in the father and the father is in me" (14:11). Clearly Jesus didn't act unless he saw his father act. Jesus desires the same abiding intimacy with us that he had with his father. Jesus draws several pictures to describe the relationship he envisions for us.

Last Sunday we heard the analogy of the Good Shepherd with the sheep and how they were deeply connected to one another. This Sunday we have vine and branches. God wants to be as close to us as a branch is to a vine. One is an extension of the other. It is impossible to tell where one starts and the other ends. The branch constantly draws nutrition from the vine. Separation means certain death.

This tells us that we are to be always in connection with God. His presence never diminishes. Our awareness of his presence may falter, but the reality of his presence never changes. This raises a question. If God is perpetually present, is it possible to enjoy unceasing communion with Him? Would it be possible to live—minute by minute in the presence of God?

Frank Laubach, a missionary wrestled with this question. Dissatisfied with his spiritual life, at the age of 45, he resolved to live in "**continuous inner conversation with God and in perfect responsiveness to God's will.**" He chronicled his adventure from January 30, 1930.

He wrote about one experience: Last Monday was the most completely successful day of my life to date. So far as giving my day in complete and continuous surrender to God is concerned ... I remember how I looked at people with love God gave, they looked back and acted as though they wanted to go with me. I

felt then that for a day I was a little of that marvelous pull that Jesus had as He walked along the road day after day **“God-intoxicated”** and radiant with the endless communion of his soul with God.

What do you think of Frank Laubach’s adventure? How would you answer his questions? Can we have that contact with God all the time awake, fall asleep in his arms, and awaken in his presence? Can we attain that?

Is such a goal realistic? Within reach? Or do you think the idea of constant fellowship with God is somewhat fanatical, even extreme? Whatever is your opinion of Laubach’s adventure, you have to agree with his observation that Jesus enjoyed unbroken communion with God. Let me remind you: **“God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like him.”** God desires the same abiding intimacy with you that he had with his son.

Does unceasing communion seem daunting, complicated? If so, remind yourself that God is the burden-remover, not the burden-giver. Unceasing prayer lightens—not heightens—our load.

How, then, do I live in God’s presence? How do I detect his unseen hand on my shoulder and his inaudible voice in my ear? A sheep grows familiar with the voice of the shepherd. How can you and I grow familiar with the voice of God. Here are few hints:

Give God your waking thoughts. Before you face the day, face the Father. Before you step out of your bed, step into his presence. This is what I do. As I get up from the bed I say “Oh God! Come to my assistance, O Lord! make haste to help me. Glory be ...” Then, I say “Thank you Lord for a night’s rest. I belong to you today.”

Try being silent with God. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps, 46: 10). Awareness of God is a fruit of stillness before God.

Dan Rather once asked St, Mother Teresa, “What do you say to God when you pray?” Mother Teresa answered quietly, **“I listen.”** Taken aback, Rather tried again, “Well, then, what does God say?” Mother Teresa smiled, **“He listens.”**

Give God your whispering thoughts. Through the centuries Christians have learned the value of brief sentence prayers, prayers that can be whispered anywhere, in any setting. Like Jesus Prayer: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me.”** Laubach sought unbroken communion with God by asking God questions every two or three minutes he would pray, **“Am I in your will, Lord?” “Am I pleasing you Lord?”**