

### **Fifth Sunday of Easter – Cycle B (May 6, 2012)**

Last week, Deacon Hector and I visited a long-time parishioner at the point of leaving this world for her new life in the Kingdom. Dozens of people entered the room, holding hands and blessing this woman of faith: family, neighbors and friends. It was a human chain of love with Christ as the spiritual Presence connecting us all.

"I am the vine and you are the branches," Jesus says in the gospel. The trunk of the vine is hidden underneath the branches; underneath our human connectedness is the life-giving presence of Christ and the fruit that comes to life: human support in suffering; solidarity with each other in times of joy and pain; peace and forgiveness. But in that room with a woman letting go was community.

The fruit of Christ is community, a coming together in His spirit, our humanity touching the other in their humanity. It was beautiful to be a part of this community grounded and rooted in Christ the Vine. He came into this world to bring people together in community. At the heart of discipleship is the reality of community: praying together, eating together, just plain being with each other. The strength of a parish is its ability to create and sustain community beyond the Eucharist

We need each other desperately...we need to belong and contribute. St. Paul, who persecuted the Christians of his time had a conversion to Jesus Christ. Naturally, the people were suspicious of this man who caused them and their community pain. But it was Barnabas who took him in and spoke for his well-being and Paul was brought into the community of believers through forgiveness. And then he spent his life nurturing other communities of faith: the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians to name a few. At the heart of Paul's theology is that we are the Body of Christ; a community of believers, each with a purpose given to us by the Spirit.

We live in times in which the reality of community is threatened by our alienating technology that creates hundreds of "friends" with a click of a switch. These "friends" are electronic with little or no felt humanity except a photo. We need each other in such a way that allows us to meet face-to-face. We need to strengthen community by dealing with conflict in the flesh, face-to-face and not by the easy message and click of the mouse.

The pruning that is demanded of this vine and branches is a painful process of letting go of all that diminishes community and involvement and self-sacrifice. We need to prune away the constant movement and frenetic activity in order to root ourselves in the Vine that lies underneath it all: Jesus: The one who holds us all together in community.