



## Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year B)

### HOMILY

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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In last Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus described himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. He presents himself to us as our leader, our protector and our saviour. He tells us that his sheep recognise his voice, know him and follow him. He reminds us that it is he who keeps us together and comes after us when we get lost. Without him we run the risk of losing our way and being unable to find our way home. The real question arising from last week's Gospel is this: do I recognise myself in the description Jesus gives us of the relationship between me, one of his sheep, and the good shepherd? This is an important question. In another place in St John's Gospel, Jesus says of himself quite clearly, *"I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life"*. He is really saying that he is the one upon whom we can, and indeed should, build our lives, if we want them to be all that God intends them to be and all that we, in our best moments, want them to be.

This morning's Gospel presents us with another image of Jesus. It is not in contradiction to the image of the Good Shepherd but rather complements and completes it. *"I am the vine,"* says Jesus, *"and you, my disciples, are the branches"*. The image of the Good Shepherd pictures Jesus as the one who sometimes strides ahead of us, leading the way; sometimes stands behind us, urging us to go in a certain direction; and sometimes stands in our midst drawing us closer to each other and to him. The image of the vine and the branches instead pictures Jesus as the one who is so closely connected to us that the very fact of our existence, of our life and of our well-being, is absolutely dependent on our connection to him. *"Whoever remains in me,"* he says, *"with me in him bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing"*.

Both of these images point us to one of the most fundamental truths of our Catholic faith. It is a truth that we often neglect, or forget and it is a truth that Pope Francis, Pope Benedict and Pope John Paul II have all reminded us of over and over again. Our faith is not, in the end, a set of moral rules to follow, or a list of doctrines we must believe. Both of these are important and indeed necessary. But both the Church's moral and doctrinal teachings are grounded in something much more fundamental – something without which they have little power to bring life.

I am speaking of course about Jesus himself who is not simply a great man who lived two thousand years ago and whose example we strive to follow in our lives today. I am speaking about Jesus who is, in his life, in his teachings, in his death and in his resurrection, the revelation of who God really is and what God is inviting us into. This is why Jesus speaks of himself as the Way – he is the one who can and does lead us to our Father, the one from whom our life comes and to whom our life is headed. It is why Jesus speaks of himself as the Truth – only he truly and deeply knows his Father and only he can unveil the face of the Father for us. And it is why Jesus speaks



of himself as the Life – only he has destroyed death and only he can share this victory of life over death with us.

To find Jesus then is to find life. To enter into communion with Jesus is to be drawn into the source of life. To remain grafted onto Jesus, as branches are to the vine, is to be able to bear fruit, to be a source of life for others.

This is why what we are doing together this morning is so important. Jesus invites us to make our home in him, to remain in him, to become one with him. And it is especially in the Eucharist, as we eat his body and drink his blood, that we are united with him in a communion so profound that it is almost impossible to believe. Saint Paul once said, when speaking of his own relationship with Christ, that he no longer lives, for it is Christ who is living in him. This is exactly what happens when we come forward to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, as so many of us will do soon. We do not take a piece of bread or drink a sip of wine. We take his body in our hands or on our tongue and sip his blood with our lips. In doing so we say yes to his gift of himself, welcome him into the very depths of our being, and allow him to begin to transform us more and more deeply into living images of himself, so that through us he can continue to offer himself to others. Like Saint Paul we can say, each time we receive Holy Communion, *“It is Christ who lives in me”*.

It is a precious and sacred thing to be invited to share in another person’s life so intimately. How much more precious and sacred it is, then, to be invited into this wonderful gift of deep friendship and love with the Lord. We must never take this gift for granted.

*“Make your home in me,”* Jesus says to us this morning, *“as I make my home in you.”* As we approach to receive Holy Communion today and the priest or minister says to us, *“the Body of Christ”* and *“the Blood of Christ”*, let us recognise the Lord who wants to live in us, who wants to be the source of a new and deeper faith and love in us, who wants to help us be the people we are created to be. Let us welcome him with reverence, with gratitude and with wonder that he should love us so much that he gives himself to us in this wonderful way. And let us then carry him with us back into the reality of our daily lives so that others might recognise him in us and open their lives to the gift of life he offers to everyone.