

Fifth Sunday of Easter (B) 2018

This past week I had the opportunity to do a burial at St. Patrick's cemetery. I had arrived early and as I was waiting for the funeral procession to arrive I couldn't help but think of those who are buried there. Some I know, many I don't.

As I was looking at the headstones I would look for the names, dates of birth, dates of death to calculate age. Sometimes a headstone would read "mother", "father". Sometimes they would have a saying; one such example was: "together forever." I paused at that headstone and thought about it for a while.

I am not a stranger to cemeteries. Certainly, my position as a deacon would bring me there, but in my own life I can tell you that we lost my sister in a car accident when she was six years old. We spent a great deal of time at the cemetery. In addition, I remember that sometimes my grandparents would dress up on Sundays and after Mass we would all go to the cemetery to visit with our loved ones, to share stories and celebrate their lives.

As I sat at St. Pat's cemetery, I couldn't help but think about my own death and that saying on the tombstone: "together forever." Thinking about that moment and today's Gospel reading I was immersed in thought about being together with the Lord forever, in life and in death. In Psalm 139 we read: "Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence where can I flee? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, if I sink to the nether world, you are present there. "

In the second reading and in the Gospel, we hear a phrase over and over again, "remain in me and I will remain in you." I believe Jesus says it six times.

The Greek word for "remain" is menein which means to be in "unity" with. Be in union with me. Be bonded to me, receive My life-giving blood, or be cut off. Some strong words, but a requirement of discipleship.

If we think we can be disciples of Jesus Christ without being in unity with Him we are wrong. We should never take this life-giving bond with Jesus for granted. Look at Peter for example, he denied Jesus three times. Or Judas, who betrayed Him. We must continue to care for and develop this relationship, this bond for the rest of our lives.

But union with Jesus does not just include a oneness with Him. It also includes bearing fruit. We must love as he loved us.

That can encompass many things. A love of God, a love of neighbor. A devotion to the Eucharist, receiving Him more often than just on Sundays, adoration, more time for prayer, forgiveness of those who hurt us. Frequent confession: sin, especially mortal sin can rupture our union with the Lord. I can go on and on.

If we can cherish and nurture our bond with Him, He will abide in us and we in Him. Imagine all the fruit we will bear. Picture being in union with Him, a union that will span eternity.