

5th Sunday of Easter – B

“Remain in me as I remain in you,” says Jesus in the gospel. “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “Whoever remains in me and I in him (or her) will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” In a recording of one of his lectures Thomas Merton tries to explain what it means to remain in Jesus and have Jesus remain in us. He says: “It’s like you’re trying to catch a plane. You’re late. You hop in your car and speed to the airport. Every delay gives you ulcers. You reach the airport parking lot, grab your stuff and race down the corridor to get to the right gate. You rush on to the plane, flop into your seat and have a sigh of relief. You made it! In one sense you have made your destination. Then the plane takes off and you are on your way to other places, going higher and faster than ever before, but now you are not frantic or worried. That’s what it means to be in Christ. That’s what it means to remain in Him and Him in you.”

Years ago an experiment was conducted in a hospital in a nursery in which newborns were kept in environmentally secure cribs. No one except the mothers were able to hold the babies, and that for just a part of the day. The babies spent most of their time in the nursery. To the surprise and fright of the “experts” the babies did not thrive, and some even began to die. Studies showed that human beings require touch to survive and thrive. Not being held, being separated from human physical contact, the babies failed to thrive and began to die.

This is just as true spiritually too. If we are separated from God, from Christ, we do not thrive. To thrive we must have contact with God. Jesus speaks about his relationship to the Father in the gospel today: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower.” Jesus made just about everyone he met feel comfortable and at peace. Sometimes his message was unsettling, and He had hard things to say, and this did drive some people away. But Jesus’ demeanor kept most people faithful to Him despite some of the hard truths he was called to speak. How do we know we are

“abiding in Christ?” St John says, “Those who keep his commandments remain in Him, and He in them, and the way we know that He remains in us is from the Spirit He gave us.” And Jesus assures us that if we remain in Him and He is us, we can ask for whatever we want and it will be done for us. Jesus is not talking about winning the lottery but he is talking about giving us whatever we need to remain in him and enjoy His presence. Without him we are like people running breathlessly for the plane. With him we are like people on the plane resting securely in Him with Jesus in the driver’s (or pilot’s) seat. Life is much easier that way.