

Father O'Connor's Homily for 28 April 2024
Fifth Sunday of Easter – B

Acts of the Apostles 9: 26-31
1 John 3: 18-24
John 15: 1-8

Jesus says to us in today's Gospel: "I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever remains in Me and I in him will bear much fruit. Because without Me, you can do nothing."

So today I would like to look at two questions with you: How connected are you to Jesus? And how connected would you like to be?

It helps to have connections. In this competitive world it can be difficult to land the job of your dreams. It often pays to know someone who can help you on your way. They may not land you the job itself, but they may help you to be considered for the job. It helps to have connections.

There was a wonderful book [originally called "Schindler's Ark"] that was published in 1982 which was later turned into a powerful movie called "Schindler's List" in 1993. And this is how the book and the movie came to be, and it had a lot to do with "making the right connections."

A Jewish shopkeeper named Leopold "Paul" Page [originally known as Leopold "Poldek" Pfefferberg] survived the Holocaust through the efforts of one man, Oskar Schindler, who was a Roman Catholic. Schindler saved the lives of some 1,200 Jews, including Page's life. In gratitude, Page promised to make Schindler famous. And so Page began looking for a writer who would be able to tell the story of Oskar Schindler.

One day a novelist, Thomas Keneally, came into Page's shop to buy a briefcase, and Page told him the story. Keneally was intrigued and agreed to commit Schindler's story to print. What resulted was a moving story of a man who helped hundreds of Jews to escape certain death at the hands of the Nazis.

But that is not the end of the story. Page, the zealous and persistent shopkeeper, had some friends, who had some friends.... And somehow he was able to bring this book to the attention of a film producer and director named Steven Spielberg. And Spielberg turned "Schindler's List" into a major motion picture which won seven Oscars, including Best Picture.

Leopold "Paul" Page was number 173 of the 1,200 Jews on "Schindler's List" who were spared death at the hands of the Nazis. Page was a shopkeeper and

not a writer or a film maker. But his gratitude led him to connect with people who could make his dream – of making Oskar Schindler famous – a reality.

A group of children was asked by their teacher: “Joe, what sound does a cow make?” And he answered, “Moo.” “Alice, what sound does a cat make?” And she replied, “Meow.” “And Jennifer, what sound does a mouse make?” And without hesitation she answered, “It goes ‘click!’”

Well, a computer mouse does go “click.” The question, “Are you connected?”, can mean different things to different people. And virtual connectedness is not the same thing as in-person connectedness that carries with it the possibility of a real, lasting, personal relationship.

Many people have a swarm of friends on Facebook. But “friending” is not the same thing as “befriending” – becoming a real friend that can be counted upon. Instead of nurturing a close global family, the internet can distract and distance us from each other. One impact is that lonely people, glued to the internet for companionship, can find themselves with no real personal friends to connect with in difficult times.

Of course, our most important connection is with Jesus Christ. Jesus says to us in today’s Gospel: “I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever remains in Me and I in him will bear much fruit. Because without Me, you can do nothing.”

We can lose our heart, we can lose our soul, if we lose our connection to God.

But God’s love for us is everlasting and unconditional. And God’s offer to re-connect is always open to each one of us.

A man kept a small piece of wood in his office. It was a section of a grape vine out of which grew a small branch. He explained that where the vine and the branch are joined together is the vine’s strongest point.

He added that if you pull a branch that goes into a tree, it will break at the trunk of the tree. In a tree, that is the weakest place. But in a grape vine, where the vine and the branch are joined together, that is the strongest place.

No wonder that Jesus used the analogy of the vine and the branches to explain His relationship with us, His followers: “I am the vine. You are the branches.” That connection with Him is a strong one.

Do you know anyone who is striving to be connected to Jesus Christ and to be connected to others? I’ll bet that you do. They are all around us. And we can be His instruments of connection.

Are there people in our communities who are lonely? Unfortunately there are. There are children, there are teens, there are adults, there are seniors who have somehow become disconnected.

It is noteworthy that when God chose to save the world, God sent His Only Son in Person.

Jesus, the Son of God, says to us: “If you want to fully live, if you want to become whole, stay connected to Me. I will never leave you or let go.”

So today I ask you one last time: How connected are you to Jesus? How connected would you like to be?

Hear Jesus offer His invitation to you today: “I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever remains in Me and I in him will bear much fruit. Because without Me, you can do nothing.”

And we might answer Jesus with the prayerful words of the hymn that we will next sing during the Preparation of the Gifts, “Abide with Me.” Here is the text of the first verse:

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.
[Breaking Bread Hymnal, #638]