

Reflection for Sunday 2nd May 2021
John 15; 1-8

What fruit are we?

I wonder if you have ever heard of the Italian painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who died in 1593. He was a highly creative painter, using objects such as fruits, vegetables, books, flowers to compose his paintings. I must admit that when I read the gospel for today, my mind was filled with images of his paintings. I thought it would be a good idea to share a couple of his paintings before considering the words of the readings, and once you have seen the painting you may never forget the words of Jesus, and this might help you reflect on what John transmits of Jesus' words.



Arcimboldo - Summer



Arcimboldo - Winter

Doesn't he come across as a very modern painter? And yet he died about 430 years ago. I am not saying you will like the paintings; I simply share an artistic interpretation of something we know well (summer and winter), made with elements we know well, and how the colours communicate the seasons.

And now we can turn to the reading. The true vine and the branches with fruit. An amazing reading, with the challenging words: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in my and I in them, will bear much fruit... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be disciples"*.

When I was small, back in Argentina, I remember that winter was a boring fruit season: apples, citrus – nothing else. While summer was full of fruit choices. That was then, now with the global market, you can find fruits no matter the season, all year round. Grapes or pears or strawberries were all summer fruits, now you can get them whenever. Look again at the paintings above and you will soon pick up the colours and variety of summer and the darkness and limitations of winter. But even in winter you can see a lemon and an orange, even if not much more.

And now let us go back to the Gospel. The image Jesus presents us with is simple, clear and to the point. Since the time of the prophets, the vine has represented the people of God (see Isaiah chapter 5 for example), and here Jesus presents himself as the true vine, the true source of life; and we are the branches, the branches which will bear the fruit. Branches that have been pruned at the right time, so they grow back with strength; that is why pruning has its time. One should never prune as spring approaches and the plants are exploding with new life, that would ruin any possibility of abundant fruit.

There are trees that give fruit in summer, and there are trees that give fruit in winter. And Jesus is not saying that the only fruit worthwhile are the summer fruits. Jesus talks about fruit, all fruit, at any time. And it is by giving fruit that we show the world we are Jesus' disciples. Of course, I am not suggesting we become an Arcimboldo painting -that would be weird and would probably frighten people away. But just as the paintings, giving the right fruit at the right time, is something people will never forget and will make a difference in their lives.

What Jesus is telling us is what every gardener knows well, and that is, branches on their own do not produce fruit (or flowers), it is only in connection with the tree that the branches produce fruit. It is only in connection with Jesus that we, the branches, will produce the fruit that is expected, the good fruit which will make us clearly visible to the world.

So, it is crucial to realize this fact – it is the fruit on one side; AND it is also the connection to the tree, and this double connection is what is central to life. And this is what we have been referring to over the last few weeks, since Easter. And in the next few weeks as we head to Pentecost, when we will be reminded of this connection, and the challenge that is to come – the fruits that will be proclaimed as the gifts of the Spirit.

In this sense our whole being is one continuous recognition of our dependence on God's grace and love: what we receive from God reaches us, transforms us, and is communicated through us to the world. And to be aware of this is an amazing gift, because it is the constant reminder of our mutual interdependency: with God and too each other.

So just before closing the Reflection, let me share with you the Collect for this Sunday:
“God of deep soil and luxuriant growth; you call us from our shallow selves to find our depth in you: may we abide in him alone who can teach us who we are; through Jesus Christ, the true vine. Amen (Prayers for an inclusive church)

This Collect reminds us of what the Gospel has said: that Jesus describes himself as the true vine, so we should be aware this implies there are also false vines, so we must be careful; that we might give fruit but remembering that not all fruit is good fruit. We must discern. It is not only a question of giving fruit, it must be good fruit (we will return to this next week), so I will just mention it here now, but let's think about that good fruit for when we Reflect next week on the gospel reading that will come.

Let us be truly connected to the true vine, let us truly give good fruit. Let us not become part of the confusion in this world, where not all is good fruit, and not all vines are the good vine. May we share our calling, working together doing what it right in the eyes of God. And may the fruit be bear be the right fruit for the time. Amen