

Lesson 11

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 15:1–8

This passage contains another of Jesus' great I AM statements. He used imagery completely familiar to His disciples: a grapevine and the care that goes into encouraging its full production of grapes. In His metaphor, He said, "I am the true Vine," the One who supplies real life power—not to grow grapes, but to grow disciples. His heavenly Father is the gardener, the viculturist. Disciples of Jesus, then and now, are the branches that grow on the Vine to produce the desired fruit. It is the ___ that is the focal point of Jesus' emphasis in His picture.

169. Why did He call Himself the *true* Vine?

170. What is the aim of all the pruning done by the Father?

171. What is the fruit that branches attached to the Vine are to produce? (See Philippians 1:9–11 and Galatians 5:22–23.) What is the end result when disciples of Jesus display their attachment to the Vine by their fruit-bearing? (See Matthew 5:16.)

172. Why are branches that bear no fruit finally cut off? Why are those that bear fruit "pruned"?

173. What does Jesus point to as essential for us as His branches if we are to bear fruit?

174. How can we continue and even improve this necessary close relationship with Jesus throughout life? How can we increase our production of fruit that will glorify the Father?

175. What promise is given to those who remain firmly attached to Jesus in faith and life?

The First Lesson: Acts 8:26–40

This incident in Acts describes an act of loving obedience that produced God’s desired fruit—a new Christian. This Philip was one of the seven men appointed as deacons in the Jerusalem Church (see Acts 6:1–6). Like Stephen, Philip had gone beyond “waiting on tables” to become an effective preacher of the Word. When persecution arose, Philip was among those who fled to Samaria, where he carried on a Gospel ministry that was being blessed with good response. Then Philip was told by the Spirit to interrupt his work in Samaria and travel south some 50 miles to have contact with one person. That’s the value of one individual in God’s gracious outlook!

The man to be contacted was an Ethiopian official, probably from the region of the upper Nile where a matriarchal kingdom had gained some kind of political acceptance by Rome. He had a position of influence as “secretary of the treasury” for Candace, the queen mother. The Ethiopian official had evidently been attracted to Judaism and had become a “God fearer,” a proselyte of the gate. He was a eunuch, probably castrated originally so he could serve in the royal harem, but had advanced to a position of high responsibility.

176. How is it that the Ethiopian official was able to read a scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah, and that he and Philip were able to converse?

Note the focus on the Word. It is through the Word that the Spirit of Jesus touches hearts. In God’s will for this man, he was reading from “the evangelist of the Old Testament,” a section that provided Philip an easy transition from prophecy about the Suffering Servant to its fulfillment in Jesus. They were traveling through hot, dry desert, but the same Lord who arranged their meeting evidently arranged for some water to be in one of the wadis they passed.

177. How did the Ethiopian show his eagerness to receive Jesus and His blessing?

The NIV text doesn’t show the weight of his concern. The Greek text says, “Is there anything that prevents me from being baptized?” This question came out of his position in Judaism. As a eunuch, he could never be received fully into Judaism, nor enter the inner temple courts—even if he wanted to accept circumcision and become a proselyte of the altar (see Deuteronomy 23:1). With his question, he was concerned about his eligibility for life in Christ.

178. What does it say about the Good News of Jesus that Philip was immediately ready to baptize him?

With God’s purpose in Philip’s traveling to the Negev to meet this one man fulfilled, Philip was taken away, and the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

179. How could this “infant” Christian be allowed to return to his homeland without receiving more complete instruction in the Christian faith?

Tradition says the Ethiopian was not only valued by God, but was valuable in God’s plan. He evangelized his people and even baptized Candace. The Coptic Church of that region traces its history to early Christian times.

180. How does this First Lesson tie in with the emphasis of today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 John 4:1–21

John’s main concern in writing his Letter was the incursion of Gnostic thought into the Church—thought that combined Greek philosophy with Christian doctrine. In its emphasis on the spirit being the only essential reality, Gnosticism stumbled at the Good News that the eternal Word actually took on our human flesh and lived among us and died for us as Jesus Christ to be the Savior, and so it disregarded the teaching of “redemption through the blood of Christ.”

181. John warned against such teachers who rejected apostolic teaching and claimed to be enlightened directly by the Spirit. What test was the Church to apply to teachers and their teaching to determine their validity? How did John reassure his readers that they would overcome the false teachers and their misleading teaching?

The “apostle of love” then continued to teach about God’s love and our responsive love. *Agape* is the Greek word for conscious, purposeful love that seeks the other’s true welfare. It appears 28 times in various forms in chapter 4, providing us a look at the spiritual base of that love.

182. Why is it that you cannot know God until you are willing to imitate Him in determined love for your neighbor? How does the love of God for us open up the possibility of our imitating Him in this way?

183. Why is it vital that we understand fully that the source of love is not “that we have loved God” but “that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”?

184. How, according to John, may we know that we live in God and God lives in us? What does the Spirit lead us to do that in itself evidences His indwelling in us? (See 1 Corinthians 12:3.) How does our knowing and confessing that Jesus is the Son of God enable us to know and rely on the love God has for us?

185. What was John saying in writing “God *is* love”? May this be turned around so that it says “Love is God?”

John said, “[His] love is perfected in us.” The Greek word *telos* in all its forms refers to “reaching the goal,” “achieving the purpose.”

186. What is the goal or purpose in God’s love, which makes us “as He is” even though still in this world, and which will give us “confidence for the day of judgment”?

187. What is the “perfect love” that casts out fear? What can the Christian who “has not been perfected in love,” who is still fearful of the Day of Judgment, do to gain the perfect love that drives out fear?

John said, “We love [are able to practice agape as God does, and are motivated to practice agape as God does] because He first loved us.”

188. Why is love for the neighbor really the only practical way for us to show love for God?