

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Year B

Acts 9:26-31

Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

I Jn 3:18-24

Jn 15:1-8

George F. Riley, O.S.A.

As he so often does, Jesus is working in today's Gospel passage with pictures and ideas which were part of the religious heritage of the Jewish nation. The vine had actually become the symbol of the nation of Israel. Jesus calls himself the true vine. The point of that word "true" is this. It is a curious fact that the symbol of the vine is never used in the Old Testament apart from the idea of degeneration. The vineyard has run wild. In the book of Jeremiah, God complains that the nation has become "obnoxious to me, a spurious vine." It is as if Jesus said: "You think that because you belong to the nation of Israel you are a branch of the true vine of God. But the nation of Israel is a false vine, as all your prophets saw. It is I who am the true vine. The fact that you are a Jew will not save you. The only thing that can save you is to have an intimate living fellowship with me, for I am the vine of God and you must be the branches joined to me."

Who was Jesus thinking of when he spoke of the fruitless branches? There are two answers. First, he was thinking of the Jews. They were branches of God's vine. But they refused to listen to him; they refused to accept him; therefore they were withered and useless branches.

Second, he was thinking of something more general. He was thinking of Christians who were useless branches, all leaves and no fruit. And he was thinking of Christians who became apostates, who heard the message and accepted it and then fell away, becoming traitors to the Master they had once pledged themselves to serve.

One thing we must remember. It is a first principle of the New Testament that uselessness invites disaster. The fruitless branch is on the way to destruction.