

FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**



Brothers and Sisters in Christ; Grace and peace!

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, our liturgy emphasizes how vital it is as Catholic Christians to *abide* in Christ in all things, for without Him we can do nothing. As a community of devout and faithful servants in our parish, all are encouraged and welcome to our daily Celebration of the Eucharist and Liturgy of the Word. This Saturday, through the permission granted to me by Archbishop Shelton Fabre, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Knoxville, I've been privileged to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to our Confirmation class this year.

the abundance of spiritual fruits realized by the apostles; how they grew from their close bond with the Risen Lord. We read how the Lord pruned the former Pharisee – Saul of Tarsus, a fanatic who had persecuted the Church – into that fruit-bearing branch called Paul, the persistent apostle to the Gentiles. St. Paul had that fiercely powerful conversion experience, but did not immediately return to Jerusalem for several years, until his life was threatened. In the Second Reading, John, in his First Letter to the Church, explains that only by clinging to Christ, putting our faith in him, doing what is pleasing to him, and drawing spiritual strength from him, will we be able to obey God's commandments.

In our Gospel, Jesus uses his beloved image of the vine and branches to help his disciples, you and me, understand the closeness of their relationship with him and the necessity of their protecting it. They are not simply rabbi and disciples; their lives are mutually dependent – as close as a vine and its branches. In fact, in using this agricultural image, Jesus is explaining what our relationship with Him should be like; with the understanding that this work is truly supernatural. In a literal sense, when we prune back our flowering plants, it is to encourage robust growth, which increases fruit or flower production-it is not an act of punishment! We too might look to trim away from our lives everything contrary to the spirit of Jesus, renewing our daily commitment to Christian ideals. When we pray the Rosary, it is an act of purging out the flood of mental ruminations, allowing His Grace to work within us. The Rosary can guard us from excessive appetites, moments of needless pride, and unwise habits.

Have you noticed that when Jesus prunes us, especially during those great moments of distress, He also purifies and strengthens us to face our pains and sufferings? It seems that we grow more in these moments than we do in the easy times. Befriending people of diverse cultures, races, and creeds in our culture enables us to prune away our selfish and prejudicial tendencies as we treat others with Christian charity. I believe many within our community have realized we have so much to learn from fellow human beings of different ancestries than ours.

Joyous Sunday!