

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

## LECTIONARY #53

READING I Acts of the Apostles 9:26-31

**A reading from the Acts of the Apostles**

When **Saul** arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then **Barnabas** took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to him, and how in **Damascus** he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord. He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him.

And when the brothers learned of this, they took him down to **Caesarea** and sent him on his way to **Tarsus**.

The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.

Whereas the previous weeks have focused on understanding the Easter events, and developing ideas about Jesus, the Father, and the early community, the readings this week issue a call to action: to be fruitful. It is not enough to know about the mystery. Rather, one must abide in it and bear fruit. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles introduces Saul/Paul, who first appeared at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:3). Consistent with earlier descriptions of the Jerusalem community, today's reading describes the community's hesitant acceptance of its former foe in a short passage marked by consistency and paradox. In terms of consistency, Paul's credentials are similar to those of the other apostles: he has seen the Lord, he speaks boldly in the name, and, like the master, he faces opposition even to death. Still, it is paradox that dominates. Saul the persecutor is now Paul the reluctantly accepted apostle. Saul, earlier in league with the Hellenists, is now opposed to and by the Hellenists. Saul, who approved of the object of their hatred. These paradoxes

fulfill what had been predicted when Saul first saw the Lord: that he would suffer for the name (Acts 9:16). Finally, Paul's rescue by the believers and his addition to the ranks of the apostles—all linked to geographical expansion and community growth—remind us of the community's active mission. Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, Paul and the apostles boldly preach in the name of Jesus, thus bearing fruit in preparation for the next phase: the outreach to the Gentiles.

Read Acts 9:1-25 to set the stage for today's reading and to help you understand why the disciples were afraid of Saul. Saul's name eventually changes to Paul, yet in today's reading it is still Saul.  
Barnabas = BAHR-nuh-buhs  
Notice the frequent use of masculine pronouns. Practice so that it is clear who they refer to.  
Damascus = duh-MAS-kuhs

Caesarea = sez-uh-REE-uh  
or see-zuh-REE-uh  
Tarsus = TAHR-suhs  
Pause for the scene change.

Judea = JOO-DEE-uh or JOO-DAY-uh  
Galilee = GAL-i-lee  
Samaria = suh-MAYR-ee-uh

### READING I

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For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32 (26a)

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.

or  
R. Alleluia.

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear

the Lord.

The lowly shall eat their fill;

they who seek the LORD shall praise him:

"May your hearts live forever!"

All the ends of the earth

shall remember and turn to the LORD;

all the families of the nations

shall bow down before him.

To him alone shall bow down  
all who sleep in the earth;  
before him shall bend  
all who go down into the dust.  
And to him my soul shall live;  
my descendants shall serve him.  
Let the coming generation be told of  
the LORD  
that they may proclaim to a people  
yet to be born  
the justice he has shown.

READING II 1 John 3:18-24

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

Children, let us love not in word or speech

but in deed and truth.

Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth

and reassure our hearts before him

in whatever our hearts condemn,

for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,

we have confidence in God

and receive from him whatever we ask,

because we keep his commandments and do what

pleases him.

And his commandment is this:

we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,

and love one another just as he commanded us.

Those who keep his commandments remain in him,

and he in them,

and the way we know that he remains in us

is from the Spirit he gave us.

READING II

Today's reading from 1 John

is best understood as a

summation of the Elder's understanding of

the gospel's primary message: "we should

love one another" (1 John 3:11). The Elder

first reflects on love by condemning the

bad behavior of the secessionists (1 John

3:13-17). Then comes today's positive

reflection on how love functions in the

community's life.

At its most basic, the Elder empha-

sizes that their love must be actively

expressed in deeds, and not just in words.

Mindful that some in the community may

and act in accord with his will.

Finally, in order to establish this fruit-

ful love, the Elder relates it to the Johannine

commandment. If the synoptic Gospels

have a two-fold commandment to love God

GOSPEL

Last week we heard Jesus

identify himself as the

Good Shepherd. It said much about who he

is. This week we hear Jesus identify himself

differently: I AM the vine. This statement

tells us much about him, but it also tells us

and neighbor, John's commandment starts

with belief in Jesus (for example, 1 John

4:9-10) and moves to the command to imi-

tate it: love one another as Jesus loved us

(for example, John 13:34-35). Thus, it is

Jesus who perfectly embodies fruitful love.

## GOSPEL John 15:1-8

## A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.

He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,

and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.

You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

Remain in me, as I remain in you.

Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own

unless it remains on the vine,

so neither can you unless you remain in me.

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.

Anyone who does not remain in me

will be thrown out like a branch and wither;

people will gather them and throw them into a fire

and they will be burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you,

ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.

By this is my Father glorified,

that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

There is a lot of repetition in this

metaphorical reading. Emphasize the new

thoughts as they are presented. Consider

recording yourself practicing and listen

to the playback.

Pruning is good for plants (and for us). If you

aren't familiar with these gardening images,

find a video online of someone pruning a

plant to give you some context for what

Jesus is talking about.

God is faithful to those who remain in him.

This is a comforting image in contrast to

what happens to those who do not remain

in God.

about ourselves and the fruitfulness

expected from us.

Five chapters of John's Gospel are

dedicated to Jesus' final comments to his

disciples at the Last Supper (John 13—17),

and they include two of the seven I Am say-

ings (John 14:6; 15:1). These powerful say-

ings reveal to us more of who Jesus is and

identify him with the Father by affirming

his divinity and their oneness. Running

throughout today's Gospel reading is the

verb "to remain" (*menein* in Greek), which

will be a key to understanding discipleship

and its fruitfulness.

The Gospel presents three related

images: Jesus as the vine, the believers as

the branches, and the Father as the vine

grower. Each party has a role to play. Jesus,

the vine, is the source for life and fruitful-

ness. The Father, the vine grower, cares for

the well-being and fruitfulness of the vine  
through a process of pruning. Finally, the  
believers, the branches, are to remain with  
Jesus, the vine. This instruction to remain  
consists of much more than passive exis-  
tence. The believer is to dwell in a process  
of pruning by the word that promotes  
growth and removes whatever is unfruitful.

In the end, believers are to bear much fruit

as the branches of the vine. This image

invites the believer into a relationship with

the Father and Son that is expressed in

self-giving love. Since the fruit of the

branches is love, we can see how this

Gospel joins the other readings for today

in emphasizing our vocation to bear a fruit-

ful love. S.L.