

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Fifth Sunday of Easter, April 28-29, 2018, Cycle B

We hear from the First Letter of John this weekend: "...let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." What the First Letter of John is saying is that we believers are to surrender ourselves to the light of God's Truth. In the gospel light, we are challenged to integrate our words with our deeds, our beliefs with our actions. To walk the talk of our belief is very difficult. We all know that at various times we say one thing and do another. In our baptismal promises – which we celebrate during this Easter season – we promise to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, but do not always follow so faithfully. At times all of us wander off onto stray paths. Sin is the human condition! We are a people often of mixed messages whose words ring hollow, because our words are contradicted by our works!

The price of integrity – living what we profess to believe – can be dear. Take St. Thomas More of mid-sixteenth century England when Henry VIII was King. When Henry VIII decided to set aside his wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn, Thomas More, who served as the King's Lord Chancellor, refused to condone Henry's action. And, when Henry VIII went so far as to declare himself the "supreme head" of the Church of England, More again refused to sign the declaration. Thomas More, through crafty at Renaissance English Law, finally remained true to his baptismal promises and was tried for treason and beheaded.

Through the centuries of Christianity, countless numbers of men and women suffered deprivation, humiliation, torture, and even death for walking the talk of the Gospel of Jesus. We call these people of integrity martyrs, and we admire our martyrs, but the quality of their character we consider out of our reach! Really! The Gospel challenge to love in word and deed and truth is not directed only to the few. The challenge of the First Letter of John to love in deed and truth is for all of us. Left to our devices, we are hopeless, though! How are we ever to succeed at all in living the Gospel!?

Jesus gives us the answer in the Gospel passage we have from John for the Fifth Sunday of Easter: "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." In other words we are not alone in our efforts to live out the Gospel. Thomas More succeeded in his witness not because of himself, but because he remained firmly rooted in Jesus as a branch is attached to the vine. His strength, his nourishment, was the life of Jesus – nourished by a deep life of prayer and at the banquet table of the Lord.

If we remain attached to Jesus as the vine through prayer, through scripture, and celebrating the Eucharist, Jesus' life will pulse in us, and at times we will surprise ourselves with how well we are living out the Gospel we say we believe.