

Pruning

That title recalls Fr. Jim Frederick's homily of last Sunday – in which he offers an interpretation of Jesus' claim to be the true vine of which we are its branches – and as such, how we need pruning to remain healthy – potent with spirit as is fermented wine. Moreover in his discourse Jesus says: *You are **already pruned** because of the word that I spoke to you.*

Now if you want to know what is meant by pruning vine branches, you have a wealth of information on the Internet under the heading: pruning. It's the practical stuff we see workers doing often when we are driving past vineyards everywhere in Sonoma County. And if Father Jim were interested mainly in explaining this agricultural practice he need only refer you to those articles. But pruning as a metaphor can carry us far into other meanings whereby *each* of us becomes a vine branch that needs pruning – needs cutting to insure our becoming healthy and fruitful in so many human, humane ways.

And to bring out this metaphorical or deeper sense of such pruning Father Jim conveyed us to what seems far afield – to Vietnam in the 1960's and warriors from opposing sides and thence to the return much later of one warrior to Vietnam and a dinner with his once opponent, in the course of which the Vietnamese veteran places an item from his own plate on that of the American veteran, while saying: *I am glad you have returned to our country.* And something happens!

Father Jim says of that moment: *the American became pruned*, which to me meant, among other things, that all the enmity that had grown out of that seemingly endless war – on both sides – had been pruned, cut away, tossed back into the war's embers – that the American (now as an older businessman) sensed or may have sensed that a change had taken place in him as had already taken place in his North Vietnamese host – a complete flip flop or what a philosopher might call a MOMENT that reconfigured the world as my dear friend Emily expressed it: *And now, I'm different from before, / As if I breathed superior air.* And throughout this homily I myself was brought back to a similar MOMENT in my own past (a kind of pruning) that indeed made me irretrievably different from what I was before – not discontinuous but somehow fulfilled – whatever the future might bring. Pruned. Changed. Converted. Bearing wounds – healed.

Since Vatican II we speak of homilies as “breaking open the word” – even as Jesus broke bread at Emmaus and woke up those two disciples, as they had never been awakened before. After his homily I approached Father Jim and expressed my appreciation of not just the change he described in his homily but of what had happened to me in his delivery of it. Jim has no need to learn more about how to prune his new backyard vines – he pruned us all quite well last Sunday – if we had ears to hear.

Now, of course, Father Jim may not concede my interpretation of his homily – but that's a matter of indifference to me because he knows that once homiletic words pass his lips he has no more ownership of them; they are really the property of the Spirit that inspired them, to use as the Spirit will – without bounds.

Geoff Wood