

5 Easter B 2018 SML
JN 15:1-10

A major concern that the (synoptic) gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke shared was to do their best to describe the kingdom of heaven. And these evangelists described the kingdom of heaven by using parable after parable:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sows good seed in his field

The kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure

The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown in the sea

The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven . . .

John, on the other hand, is the different gospel. As the synoptics Matthew, Mark and Luke were more concerned with describing the kingdom of heaven, John was more concerned with describing Our Blessed Lord, using *Ego Eimi* sayings, "I AM" saying after "I AM" saying, keeping in mind that according to what Moses heard in the burning bush, "I AM" is God's name:

I AM the bread of life

I AM the living water

I AM the light of the world

I AM the way, the truth and the life

In last Sunday's gospel, I AM the good shepherd
and in this evening's (morning's) gospel, I AM the vine.

Our Blessed Lord's *Ego Eimi*, namely, "I AM the vine. You are the branches," was brought up at table at the Last Supper. Since Our Blessed Lord had already spoken of the unity between the Apostles and Himself through His teaching of the Eucharist (JN 6), He would take up the theme again under the image of the vine and the branches. Now this unity of which He spoke did not exist while He was speaking at the table in the Upper Room, for that very night, the Apostles would all desert Him and flee. Rather, it was a unity that would be had after He:

- ✓ sacrificed his life,
- ✓ rose from the dead on the third day,
- ✓ and the Holy Spirit descended upon them and Our Blessed Lady come Pentecost.

Now the image of the vine used by Our Blessed Lord was a very familiar one in the Old Testament. Israel was called a vine, the vine that was brought out of Egypt.

- ✓ The prophet Isaiah spoke of God as having planted that chosen vine.

My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: what more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: take away its hedge, break through its walls, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin!”

- ✓ The prophet Jeremiah complained that the vine of Israel was not fruitful.

“I had planted you, a choice vine of fully tested stock; how could you turn out obnoxious to me, a spurious vine?”

- ✓ The prophet Hosea complained against Israel as well:

“Israel is a luxuriant vine whose fruit matches its growth, the more abundant his fruit, the more altars (were) built (to the false gods).”

- ✓ Contrasting the manna that was given by Moses, Our Blessed Lord called himself the “True Bread”
- ✓ in contrast to the brilliant lights of the Feast of Tabernacles, He called Himself the “True Light”
- ✓ in contrast to the temple built by hands, He called Himself the “Temple of God” not made by hands

- ✓ so now in contrast to the vine of Israel, He said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.”

Not only was the image of the vine familiar from a religious and scriptural point of view, it was also familiar from a “hands on, day to day, domestic” point of view. The vine was grown all over Palestine and it is a plant that needs a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be got out of it. The vine was commonly grown on terraces, trellises, walls, and around doors of homes.

But in the case of Our Blessed Lord:

- ✓ vines produced grapes,
- ✓ and grapes produced wine,
- ✓ and Our Blessed Lord changed water into wine,
- ✓ and Our Blessed Lord changed wine into His Blood,
- ✓ and then He gave a divine teaching on the unity between His Apostles and Him using the image of the vine and the branches,
- ✓ and the next day Our Blessed Lord sacrificed His life.

To Our Blessed Lord’s list of *Ego Eimis* sayings,

I AM the bread of life

I AM the living water

I AM the light of the world

I AM the way, the truth and the life

I AM the good shepherd

I AM the gate

I AM the resurrection

I AM the life

I AM the vine

is Our Blessed Lord's challenge to us. What *Ego Eimi*, what I AMs could we use to describe ourselves? Or better yet, let's flip that into What *Eimi Ego*, what AM I questions could I ask?

AM I the good and holy priest?

AM I the good dad?

AM I the good mom?

AM I the beloved spouse?

AM I the faithful son?

AM I the faithful daughter?

AM I the law abiding citizen?

AM I the fair boss?

AM I the hard working employee?

AM I the courteous driver?

AM I the conscientious student?

The list goes on. What *Ego Eimis*, what I AMs could we use to describe ourselves? Or better yet, let's flip that into What *Eimi Ego*, what AM I questions could I ask?