

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2006**  
**(Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B)**  
**(Acts 9:26-31; Ps 22; 1 John 3:18-24; John 15:1-8)**

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The theme of today's readings can be considered to be "life in (the body of) Christ." Saul, Paul, had a vision of the risen Jesus as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36; 9:3-5). From then on, the former Pharisee would be convinced that salvation —survival of God's judgment in the day of his wrath (see, e.g., 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rom 5:9; Rev 6:12-17; 14:6-13; 19:11-16; 1 John 4:17)— is assured to those who are found to be *in Christ* (Rom 8:1; 12:5; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:16-21; Phil 3:8-11; Eph 2:6-10). Now Paul, in the first reading, as he gets together with fellow Christians (who are at first a bit distrustful of him), suffers persecution as did Christ (see Acts 9:13-16). As Luke ends his narrative in the first reading, on a hopeful note, so does Ps 22, the Passion psalm par excellence ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") end on a note of victory.

The second reading refers to that condemnation which being in Christ saves us from. God's love and forgiveness (also called "justification," see Rom 3:21-26; 5:1-5), which we receive through faith in Christ, is greater than our conscience and our pettiness (cf. 1 Cor 4:1-5). The important thing is to remain *in Christ* by keeping his commandments (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 2:3; 3:24).

This Pauline "being in Christ" is what the gospel reading presents in Johannine language. The image of the people of God as a vine or vineyard is common in the Old Testament. Ps 80:9-17 describes the vine that God rescued from Egypt but which later was ravished; cf. Isa 5:1-7; 27:2-13; Mar 12:1-12. In Matt 21:43, the vineyard is called the "kingdom of God." The "Kingdom of God" was a cherished biblical image Jesus often used; in John, Jesus is the Kingdom (R.E. Brown); Ps 80:18 was applied to the Messiah by some Jews. Today we can perhaps more easily relate to the image of ourselves as the body of Christ who must remain "attached" to him (in the sense of marital union, see Gen 2:24; Deut 4:4; 10:20; 11:22, etc.). Jesus is the bridegroom, John 3:29; cf. Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17. We bear fruit by being very close to him in prayer, obedience and good works. And by the eucharist, which is in the background (cf. *Didache*).