

Easter 5B 2015

The Vine & the Branches

In today's gospel Jesus describes the intimate relationship that exists between him and us: He is the vine, we are the branches, and his Father is the gardener who prunes and cleanses us so that we will bear fruit.

Jesus is the vine because he is the source of the life of grace that brings us to God. It is he who unites us to God and to each other. So long as we are in Jesus we bear fruit, and we are united to each other. But if we separate ourselves from the vine, if we are not rooted in the vine, we do not possess the life of grace; we no longer enjoy the life of the Spirit; we are no longer united to each other.

We are the branches. And just a branch is to bear much fruit, so the purpose of our lives is to bear fruit: the fruit of faith, hope, and love. The fruit we are to bear is the life of discipleship lived in the community of the church. The fruit we are to bear is the fruit of peace and joy that only that only God can give.

If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, it is *God who prunes the branches* so that we can produce more fruit. Like a good gardener, God cuts away the selfishness that keeps us from living in community with each other. God cuts away the envy that leads to bitterness and disputes. God cuts away all anger and hatred so that we can bear the fruit of justice and peace.

There are moments, however, when we forget that Jesus is the vine. There are moments when we forget that we cannot bear the good fruit of the gospel if we are not intimately united with Jesus in the Eucharist and in prayer. At such moments we are no longer united with each other in the community of the church because we are no longer united with Christ, the source of our life.

There are other moments when we forget that the goal of our Christian life is to produce the fruit of the gospel: the fruit of goodness and holiness, the fruit of justice and peace, the fruit of a life lived in the Holy Spirit. When this happens, we lose our sense of purpose and direction; we fail to attain the goal of our life.

And there are still other moments that we forget that God is the gardener. At such moments, we resist the work of God. At such moments we resist the grace of God who cuts away all that would prevent us from producing more abundant fruit.

The Christian life is a life lived in Christ, with and for each other. It is a life intended to blossom forth with the fruit of the gospel. It is a life made possible because Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and God is the gardener. As you receive the Eucharist, reflect upon the intimate union you enjoy in Christ the vine. Consider the intimate union we have with each other because we are the branches and Christ is the vine. Consider the fruit of the gospel that we can produce if we allow God cleanse and purify us from all sin.