

GOSPEL

JOHN 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you.

Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The Word of God, even on this Fifth Sunday of Easter, continues to indicate to us the way and the conditions to be a community of the Risen Lord. Last Sunday the relationship between the believer and Jesus the Good Shepherd was highlighted. Today the Gospel offers us the moment in which Jesus introduces himself as the true vine and invites us to abide in him so as to bear much fruit (cf. Jn 15:1-8). The vine is a plant whose branches form the whole; and the branches are only fruitful insofar as they are joined with the vine. This relationship is the secret of Christian life and John the Evangelist expresses this with the word 'abide', which is repeated seven times in today's passage. "Abide in me", says the Lord; abide in the Lord.

It means abiding in the Lord in order to find the courage to step outside of ourselves, from our comfort zone, from our limited and protected spaces, in

order to cast ourselves into the open sea of the needs of others and to give a wide range to our Christian witness in the world. This courage to step outside ourselves and to advance the needs of others is born from faith in the Risen Lord and from the certainty that his Spirit accompanies our history. One of the ripest fruits that springs from communion with Christ is, in fact, the commitment to charity for our neighbour, loving brothers and sisters with self-sacrifice, to the point of the final consequences, as Jesus loved us. The dynamism of believers' charity is not the result of strategies; it is not born of external stresses, of social or ideological concerns, but rather, it is born from the encounter with Jesus and from abiding in Jesus. For us he is the vine whose sap — that is, 'life' — we absorb, in order to convey into society a different way of living and self-spending which places the least in first place.

When we are intimate with the Lord, as the vine and branches are intimate and joined, we are able to bear the fruits of new life, of mercy, of justice and peace, derived from the Lord's Resurrection. It is what the Saints did, those who lived Christian life in fullness and lived the witness of charity, because they were true branches of the vine of the Lord. But "to be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious.... We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14). We are all called to be holy; we must be holy with this richness we have received from the Risen Lord. Every activity — work and rest, family and social life, exercising political, cultural and economic responsibilities — every activity, whether small or great, if lived in union with Jesus and with the attitude of love and of service, is an occasion to live Baptism and Gospel holiness to the fullest.

May Mary, Queen of Saints and example of perfect communion with her Divine Son, help us. May she teach us to *abide in Jesus*, as branches

in the vine, and to never distance ourselves from his love. Indeed, we can achieve nothing without him, because our life is the living Christ, present in the Church and in the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus requests that we remain in him throughout our Gospel today. What does it mean to you to remain or abide, as Pope Francis says, in Jesus?
- Pope Francis tells us that abiding in Jesus produces the fruit of new life. Have you experienced fruit by abiding in Jesus? What was that fruit?
- When we remain with Jesus, we feel safe and courageous to go out of our comfort zone. What is a way that you take your faith into your ordinary life?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.