



# LIVING THE GOSPEL



**Fifth Sunday of Easter  
April 28, 2024**

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**Theme: "I am the vine, you are the branches."**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** Almighty ever-living God, constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us, that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism may, under your protective care, bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

### **Gospel Reading: John 15:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

<sup>2</sup> Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

### **Gospel Focus**

Jesus' image of himself as vine and us as branches is a lovely pastoral image, but it includes some hard truths. Jesus warns that those who do not bear fruit will be removed from the vine, and even those that remain will be subjected to pruning. Pruning is fascinating practice, beginner gardeners are often hesitant to cut off large portions of their carefully grown plants. But plants respond to losing limbs by putting more energy forth to regrow. Their production is increased by having segments of themselves detached. We, too, often need to prune away those things that keep us from fruitfulness. Our lives can become cluttered with possessions and attachments that do not truly serve God. When we detach from those things, it makes more space for God to work in our lives and makes more space to become more fully ourselves, bearing beautiful fruit for God.

## Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks of the Father as a vintner who prunes branches that are bearing fruit so that they will produce even more. There is a strong emphasis on bearing fruit, the expression "bear fruit" occurs five times in the passage. It speaks not only of the fecundity in our relationship with God but also of missionary outreach and of interdependence with the other branches in the vine.

The image of God as a vine grower and Israel as the vineyard is a familiar one in the Scriptures (e.g., Isa 5:1-7; 27:2-5; Jer 2:21; Ps 80:8-18). Most often the metaphor is used to express God's disappointment in the lack of yield from the vine so tenderly planted and nurtured. In the Gospel of John, this is not the case. The disciples Jesus is addressing in this Last Supper scene (15:3) are "already pruned" so that they will bear more fruit. Branches that do not bear fruit are taken away.

Pruning is a Johannine metaphor for the passion. It is akin to the image in John 12:24, where Jesus speaks of the seed that must fall to the ground and die in order to bear much fruit. The emphasis is on the life that sprouts forth from the dying and the pruning. Expert gardeners know that the place to prune is, paradoxically, where the nodes are bursting with life.

From pruning, the stress in the gospel shifts to the importance of the branch remaining united to the vine in order to bear fruit. A branch cannot bear fruit on its own; cut off from the vine, it withers and dies, and then is good only for kindling. That remaining or abiding in Jesus is crucial for disciples is evident in that verb *menein*, "to abide" occurs eight times in these eight verses. This mutual indwelling has been spoken of since the opening chapter of the gospel, where the first question asked by the initial two disciples is "where are you staying (*pou meneis*)" (1:38). Another important moment is when the Samaritans ask Jesus to stay (*menein*) with them (4:40). In the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus tells his followers, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains [abides: *menei*] in me and I in him" (6:56). True disciples abide in Jesus' words (8:31) and Jesus' words remain in disciples (15:7). When Jesus tells his disciples he is going to prepare a dwelling place for them (14:2), it becomes clear the "abiding place" is not a geographical locale but is Jesus himself (14:6) where also the Father makes his home (14:23), along with the Spirit (14:17).

How can we ensure that we are abiding in Christ and he in us? In the second reading, 1 John 3:24 gives a simple formula: "Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us." The writer also spells out what it means to keep the commandments: "we should believe in the name of ... Jesus Christ and love one another just as he commanded us" (1 John 3:23).

## Old/New Testament and CCC links

### First Reading — Acts 9:26-31

<sup>26</sup> And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, <sup>29</sup> preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. <sup>30</sup> And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.

<sup>31</sup> So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.

## Responsorial Psalm — Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

**(R): I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the Lord. The lowly shall eat their fill; they who seek the Lord shall praise him: "May your hearts live forever!" **(R)**

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him. **(R)**

To him alone shall bow down all who sleep in the earth; before him shall bend all who go down into the dust. **(R)**

And to him my soul shall live; my descendants shall serve him. Let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice he has shown. **(R)**

## Second Reading — 1 John 3:18-24

<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

<sup>19</sup> By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him <sup>20</sup> whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

## Catechism of The Catholic Church

**517.** Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross,(Cf. Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14; 1 Pt 1:18-19) but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:

- already in his Incarnation through which by becoming poor he enriches us with his poverty;(Cf. 2 Cor 8:9)
- in his hidden life which by his submission atones for our disobedience;(Cf. Lk 2:51)
- in his word which purifies its hearers;(Cf. Jn 15:3)
- in his healings and exorcisms by which "he took our infirmities and bore our diseases";(Mt 8:17; cf. Is 53:4)
- and in his Resurrection by which he justifies us.(Cf. Rom 4:25)

**737.** The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission henceforth brings Christ's faithful to share in his communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit *prepares* men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit *manifests* the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his Death and Resurrection. He *makes present* the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to *bring them into communion* with God, that they may "bear much fruit."(Jn 15:8,16)

**787.** From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings.(Cf. Mk 1:16-20; 3:13-19; Mt 13:10-17; Lk 10:17-20; 22:28-30) Jesus spoke

of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: "Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches."(Jn 15:4-5) And he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."(Jn 6:56)

**859.** Jesus unites them to the mission he received from the Father. As "the Son can do nothing of his own accord," but receives everything from the Father who sent him, so those whom Jesus sends can do nothing apart from him,(Jn 5:19, 30; cf. Jn 15:5) from whom they received both the mandate for their mission and the power to carry it out. Christ's apostles knew that they were called by God as "ministers of a new covenant," "servants of God," "ambassadors for Christ," "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."(2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 5:20; 1 Cor 4:1)

**1694.** Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, Christians are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord.(Rom 6:11 and cf. 6:5; cf. Col 2:12) Following Christ and united with him,(Cf. Jn 15:5) Christians can strive to be "imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love"(Eph 5:1-2) by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to the "mind . . . which is yours in Christ Jesus,"(Phil 2:5) and by following his example.(Cf. Jn 13:12-16)

**2074.** Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."(Jn 15:5) The fruit referred to in this saying is the holiness of a life made fruitful by union with Christ. When we believe in Jesus Christ, partake of his mysteries, and keep his commandments, the Savior himself comes to love, in us, his Father and his brethren, our Father and our brethren. His person becomes, through the Spirit, the living and interior rule of our activity. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."(Jn 15:12)

**2732.** The most common yet most hidden temptation is our *lack of faith*. It expresses itself less by declared incredulity than by our actual preferences. When we begin to pray, a thousand labors or cares thought to be urgent vie for priority; once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love? Sometimes we turn to the Lord as a last resort, but do we really believe he is? Sometimes we enlist the Lord as an ally, but our heart remains presumptuous. In each case, our lack of faith reveals that we do not yet share in the disposition of a humble heart: "Apart from me, you can do *nothing*."(Jn 15:5)

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. What is message of Jesus for you in this weekend's gospel?
2. What is the most difficult aspect of abiding in Jesus, for you?
3. How do you respond to the statement Jesus makes to his disciple, "that you bear much fruit"?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** God the vine grower, you remain with your people and enable us to bear much fruit Receive our prayers that through careful tending and pruning we might grow each day in our discipleship. We ask this through Jesus our risen Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen