

Meditations: Sunday of the Fifth Week of Easter (Year B)

Some reflections that can guide our prayer during this season of Easter. The topics are: united to Christ, the vine; bearing more fruit; we are all branches of the same vine.

- United to Christ, the vine
 - Bearing more fruit
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JESUS'S LISTENERS are familiar with agricultural tasks. Vineyards were an important part of the history of the people of Israel, including in their sacred texts. That is why Christ focuses on element from the vineyard, applying it to his apostles' relationship with Him: *I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener [...]. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me (Jn 15:1,4).*

"Christ himself came into this world through his incarnation, to be our root. Whatever hardship or drought befall us, he is the source that offers us the water of life, that feeds and strengthens us. He takes upon himself all our sins, anxieties and sufferings and he purifies and transforms us, in a way that is ultimately mysterious, into good branches that produce good wine. In such times of hardship we can

sometimes feel as if we ourselves were in the wine-press, like grapes being utterly crushed. But we know that if we are joined to Christ we become mature wine. God can transform into love even the burdensome and oppressive aspects of our lives. It is important that we 'abide' in Christ, in the vine."^[1] —

Living united to Christ is the key to happiness, and unity is the fruit of love. That is why people who love each other grow into harmonious unity in their ideas, wills, and affections. They end up sharing what is "theirs" so that the other person's concerns are as important as their own. Allowing this affinity to develop in our dealings with Jesus is a source of joy and security. We unite our lives to Him in prayerful conversation, and we become more identified with Christ through the grace given to us in the sacraments.

AT TIMES we go through periods with less enthusiasm, when we seem to receive fewer lights and we have more difficult days. That is the time to remember that it is the Lord who gives life, flowers, and fruits. Plants are usually pruned at the end of winter, in preparation for the arrival of spring. "Have you not heard the Master himself tell the parable of the vine and the branches? Here you can find consolation. He demands much of you, for you are the branch that bears fruit. And he must prune you 'to make you bear more fruit'. Of course: that cutting, that pruning hurts. But, afterwards, what richness in your fruits, what maturity in your actions."^[2]

"In order to bear fruit, Jesus experienced love to the fullest, allowing himself to be split open by death as a seed lets itself split open

under the ground. Precisely there, at the lowest point of his abasement — which is also the loftiest point of love — *hope burgeoned*. [...] Feel how truly the Paschal Mystery transforms: Jesus has transformed our sin into forgiveness; our death into resurrection, our fear into trust. This is why there, on the Cross, our hope is always born and born anew. This is why with Jesus, all our darkness can be transformed into light, every defeat into victory, every disappointment into hope."^[3] —

When we know that God wants to take care of us and make us better, we are eager for Him to remove any obstacles or unnecessary weights on us. We learn to love better and to trust Him more. God makes use of our confusion, misunderstandings, and unseen efforts to prepare us for our mission. He strengthens us interiorly and increases our capacity to love through the Cross. Through it,

we become more generous, imitating in our own way Christ's divine extravagance.

IT IS wonderful to contemplate the way we are all branches of the same vine. It leads us to admire others' virtues and talents, thanking God because He beautifies and fills our brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends with his fruits. Thus we live united to Christ and among ourselves. When we hold fast to the passion for unity within our souls, others' mistakes cannot disturb us, because we recognize them as paths of growth for the others and for us. We do not hold grudges or suspicions; we want to serve everyone, because we are all branches united to Jesus.

Therefore, union with Christ is, at the same time, union with all the others to whom He gives Himself. I cannot have Christ only for myself. "The branches have no life of their own: they live only if they remain united to the vine where they have sprouted. Their life is identified with that of the vine. The same sap circulates between the vine and the branches; both bear the same fruit. Between them, therefore, there is an indissoluble bond, which symbolizes very well the one that exists between Jesus and his disciples: 'Remain in me, as I in you.'"^[4]

We know that "our love is not to be confused with sentimentality or mere good fellowship [...]. Rather, it means living in peace with our neighbour, venerating the image of God that is found in each and every man and doing all we can to get them in their turn to contemplate that image, so that they may learn how to

turn to Christ."^[5] The creature most united to God, who has best reflected the face of Christ, is the Blessed Virgin Mary. She can remind us that the Lord is also in the branches and that, like us, our sisters and brothers in the faith are united to the true vine.

^[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 22-IX-2011.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 701.

^[3] Pope Francis, General Audience, 12-IV-2017.

^[4] St. John Paul II, General Audience, 25-I-1995.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 230.

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