

Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday

From our reading from the Gospel according to St. John

“... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”

In today's Second Lesson, our Lord Jesus claims us as His own. He commands us to continue to faithfully follow His word, and he cautions us against failure to follow Him. He draws the comparison between Him and His followers and the fruit and the vine. As the vine does not produce without continued nourishment and care, the Christian needs the continued relationship with Jesus Christ to be fruitful:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”

Abide in, or in other words, always stay in the love, grace and faith of Jesus Christ. This is the source of our spiritual nourishment. And, as we live in Jesus Christ, He lives in us. We say this every Sunday that we share in Holy Communion: *“that He may dwell in us, and we in Him.”*

When we allow Jesus Christ to live in us, to guide us, teach us, and inspire us, then we act in accordance with His will. We truly then allow God to show Himself through us. He guides us to acts of kindness, of charity, of Christian love. His Word then shows through our lives and our actions to become a beacon to the world.

It is important to note that we cannot do this on our own: “...as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”

In staying faithful, we produce that which God wishes us to produce.

If Jesus Christ is the vine, and we its branches, then the Father is the vintner, the husbandman, who cares for and continues to prune the vine. It is the job of the branches of the vine to be fruitful. There are many branches, but all part of the one vine. The branches, while they are part of and abide in the vine, can flourish and prosper and be fruitful. Of themselves alone, they are weak and cannot live. In this reality, it is true that some branches do not produce.

These branches are as the “suckers” on a plant, shoots which grow, and use up the resources of the vine, and yet do not produce fruit. These non-productive branches will be removed by the husbandman. They are not doing their duty to the vine.

Sadly, some who seem a part of the vine of Christ do not produce. They will be pruned as well. Christians must be fruitful. They must be productive. They must “bear good fruit.”

From a vine, we expect grapes. From a Christian, we—and God—expect a Christian life. The Christian is expected to have a Christian disposition, Christian devotions and values. A Christian honors God, professes his or her faith, produces the fruit of doing good works. As the Twelfth Article of Religion reminds us:

“Good Works ... are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification.... They are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”^v

“*He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit,*” says Jesus. This makes sense that with God we are capable of

producing much fruit. With the power, the strength, and the grace of Jesus Christ dominating our life, we can only show forth the grace received from Christ. This is not because of our own free will, but because of Him who lives in us and through us.

In staying faithful, we produce that which God wishes us to. The consequences of ignoring this reality or fighting against it, are startling and frightening.

First, even attempting to do good without the indwelling of Jesus Christ is futile. Man—on his own—can do nothing that is spiritually good. Nothing good happens without Jesus Christ and His spirit, His grace and His presence. As the Thirteenth Article of Religion teaches: “Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ”

If the branch produces no good fruit, then it is cut off:

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch,” Jesus says.

This surely referred to Judas, who was found to be a traitor to Jesus and cast off, but it also applies to the “pretend Christian” and those who, at the first sign of trouble or adversity, quickly fall away from the faith.

We know that there is a Judgment. We know that we will give account for all our doings and failures. The unproductive branches of the vine are cut off and gathered, then cast into the fire; they are good for nothing else. So too will the unfruitful in God be cast away into everlasting fire at the last day.

But for the fruitful servant, there is a much different fate:

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

Eternal life, joy, peace, grace, and salvation shall be yours. This explains why we are we asked to do these things? *“Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.”*

When Christians abide in Christ, live in His word, God is glorified. This is, after all, why Jesus came to live among us. He came to teach us, to lead us, to save us. When we show forth the results of living in Jesus, and His living in us, then we glorify Him. We can then focus on the task of “staying faithful and producing what God wishes us to produce.” We bear the fruits of doctrine, of grace and good works, and the origin of this good fruit is shown to be God, working through His people.

Before every action, especially those that cause you to pause and think, ask yourself. “Do I glorify God by doing this?” Am I being selfish? Am I being kind to others? Am I committing sin or not living up to my potential? Does what I am doing glorify God?

This, Jesus says, is how we become His disciples. Disciples are not “part-time” followers. Disciples are not “latest fad” band wagon Christians. Disciples are the devotees of Jesus, the branches of His vine. We live in Him, and He in us. We glory in His love, and return it freely: *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”*

Jesus is the only-begotten son of the Father. It is Jesus of whom the Father said, “Behold my son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is Jesus who is Head of the Church, who “sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” It is Jesus who will be our judge.

Jesus makes us one with Him. He dwells within us and permits us to dwell in Him. He offers to us salvation, and eternal life with God in Heaven and peace everlasting. He came to live as one of us, even dying upon the cross to save us. And so he gives us His command: *“Continue ye in my love.”*

Continue to love me and continue to live in my love for you. Remain one with Jesus that He may continue to live in us as we continue to live

in Him. Continue to follow in the ways of God, doing good works and showing Him to others through your own life.

Stay faithful and produce those things that God wishes you to.

Let us pray.

God, help us always to produce good fruit, Open our hearts and minds to more fully understand your call and give us the grace to live more fully into your love and your Word. Let us never become the fruitless branch, but rather always the branch that bears the fruit that You would have us produce. In Your time, let us join in your glorious harvest to live with you and all the Saints forever in Heaven. This we pray in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

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