

# TO BE THE BRANCHES SUSTAINED BY THE VINE



A Gospel reflection  
by Fr. Michael Dias



Jesus said to his disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in them bears much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

“Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

**John 15:1-8**

In our culture today, dependence seems detestable. Proud individualists that we are, we crave for independence, and the more the better.

Dependence, we feel, diminishes a person, decreases one's individuality and lessens one's personality. Considering dependence oppressive, we are depressed by it. Our constant effort then is to throw off this burden of reliance on others and instead breathe freely on our own.

Jesus speaks clearly of dependence; but not one that is an oppressive and suppressive diminishing of our individuality. On the contrary, it is a most fruitful and fulfilling dependence. The dependence that Jesus speaks of begins as such, then grows and ripens into a communion, an intimate sharing and enriching of life. In this sharing, man experiences authentic freedom and enjoys genuine fulfillment.

Man is made in the image of God and he is made for God. Thus, it is in recognizing his dependence on God that man becomes fully human. Through communion with God he becomes fully himself. Cut off from God, man's humanity wilts and shrivels. He loses his true sense of self. Do we not see this truth hidden beneath the troubles and disorders of our world today?

Christ, the Son of God, is the proper measure of man. Every man finds his true identity in Christ who provides us with the perfect and definitive image of God as man.

He is the Son of God who makes us children of God. Christ is the most proper environment, the most natural habitat, the most congenial milieu within which we can grow and bloom into our full humanity. We reflect more brilliantly the image of our Father and become a ripe fruit when we are grown upon the vine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we read in this Scripture, Jesus is the divine vine which we are grafted onto. To grow abiding in Him demands our compatibility of character; we must strive to be like Him. The greatest risk in organ transplantation is incompatibility - the rejection of the foreign body by the original body. Similarly, without compatibility of character between Jesus and His disciples, no growth, no fruition, no intimacy is possible. Sinful as we are, we humans must seek purification, if we wish to become more compatible with Jesus the sinless. Such a compatibility that leads to communion, intimacy and fruition takes place on the level of the spirit. We often speak colloquially of “kindred spirits”. Spiritual kinship is expressed through a shared perception, a shared reality. Words give expression to thoughts. Through words, the spirit is given an exterior form. And so those who hear and accept the words of Jesus become one in spirit with Him.



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To accept the words of Jesus, we disciples have to give up our own ideas and attitudes. Our 'spirit' has to be purified and cleansed of what is incompatible with the spirit of Jesus. So Jesus tells His disciples, "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you."

"Abide in Me." We abide in Jesus by accepting the words of Jesus as true. We can take His words to heart because He speaks to us as friends. "I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15). Words communicate and reveal the person. As the famous expression of Socrates goes, "Speak, so that I may see you." Words are vehicles of communication between persons that bring them into communion. By loving the words of Jesus, we abide in Him and become like Him. We abide in Christ and Christ abides in us.

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As members of the Church, we can see more clearly this image of us as the living branches on the vine of Christ. As we participate in the sacred liturgy, we are shaped, pruned, trimmed and nourished by the Word of God and the Sacred Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus wants his disciples to be a vibrant, fruitful presence in the world, and by this nourishment we are sent forth to bear much fruit. But those who do not practice the teachings of Jesus and do not allow God's Word to take root in them cannot bear fruit for God's Kingdom. They are like the dead branches which will be cut off. Such is the dangerous temptation of our time, where independence and self reliance are extolled as the highest of societal values, where the values of the Christian faith are often treated as obstacles to living for myself and my aims. It is no surprise our time is riddled with loneliness, with a lack of communion, a lack of meaning, for there are many branches cut off.

But it is communion for which we were made. To be in communion with our community, with our church, with our closest friends and family and the distant stranger.



Jesus invites his followers to make their home in Him, to trust in Him, to be grafted on to Him and to draw nourishment from Him in the way that branches are nourished from the central vine. Such dependence invites us to a deeper trust and communion that we can share with the world around us. A deep trust and faith in the person of Jesus will bear fruit in our lives and the lives of those around us. We will be empowered to bring consolation and confidence to those who are weak and in need. Moreover, our heavenly Father is glorified in the works of Christ and His disciples when they give love to those around them. "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active. You won't meet Christ in your Sunday liturgy if you haven't rubbed shoulders with him in the office, in the factory or in the kitchen. You won't hear his message from the altar, if you were deaf to his call at your office desk. Jesus put it simply and bluntly: "It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and then you will be my disciples." This is the love of Jesus Christ in which we are invited to abide.

Abiding is not only a state of mind and spirit. Jesus emphatically says the road of abiding consists in keeping his commandments. There is a responsibility attached to this election to the works of fruit bearing, for we are to bear "fruit that will last."

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What does that mean? Obviously, some 'fruit' does not last. Short-sightedness, impetuosity, selfish interests masked as the work of the Church, raw ambition disguised as false humility in the service of God - the list is long and everyone can knowingly add to it through observations of the fruits that rot rather than last.

Positively, bearing fruit means making wise choices on behalf of God. It means acting thoughtfully over a lifetime, discerning what thoughts, words, and actions best serve the intentions of a loving God in this world, most clearly seen in the figure of the Risen Christ.

*God bless!*

