

Is your life fruit bearing enough?

Homily for may 14th, 5th Easter Sunday: Acts. 9: 26-31; I Jn. 3: 18-24; Jn. 15:1-8

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Today's Gospel dealing with the parable of the vine and the branches is really applicable to us as its theme is bearing fruition of our life. Since everybody wants to make his life most fruitful and not even a single person desires to leave his life barren it is well that we learn that secret from the very author of life himself. The fact that the Church ask us to reflect on this parable at this point of the Easter season, a season when the Apostles' profound experience of the Risen Lords' abiding presence in them turned their life amazingly fruitful, helps us to understand the implications of this parable deeper.

Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser". The comparison of the chosen people with a vine has been used in the Old Testament:(Ps. 80) of the uprooting of the vine in Egypt and its replanting in another land; and in Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard(5: 1-7) God complains that despite the care and love he has lavished on it, his vineyard has yielded only wild grapes. Now, Jesus claims that he himself is the true vine, because, the old vine, the original chosen people, has been replaced by the new vine, the Church, whose head is Christ. To be fruitful, then one must be joined to the new, true vine, Christ: it is no longer a matter of simply belonging to a community but of living a life of deep relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ, the life of grace, which is the animating force that passes life on to the believer and enables him to yield the fruits of eternal life.

In this context let us ask ourselves: how can we make our life fruit bearing? Before we answer this question from the gospel, it may be helpful to consider the various common views about making life fruitful. For some, bearing fruit is doing ones duty; for others, working hard to take the best care of their family; for others, making the best use of all their abilities; for some others, working for the welfare of others, especially taking care of the sick, poor, lonely, and so on and so forth. Of course, all these are very good objectives.

In today's gospel Jesus gives us the most salutary answer: "*I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing*". What does Jesus mean by bearing fruit in the light of the above said words? It means, becoming like Jesus and acting exactly as he did perfect way of bearing real fruit, because, it goes without saying that the fruit that is produced by the branch is exactly the same that of the tree. He declared: "*I am the vine, you are the branches*". If we are His branches , then nothing less than the fruits he produced will suffice for us to be fruitful!

If bearing fruit means acting exactly as Jesus did, there is no choice other than living a life of such an intimate union with Him to such an extent we almost become like Him and act like Him. If this is what Jesus means by bearing fruit or making life fruitful, we have to refashion our lifestyle thoroughly. If then, how can any one of us say, oh, I am ok, the way I live now is perfectly alright, I don't have to improve any more etc? If this is His measurement of the fruitfulness of life, it is obvious that we haven't reached anywhere near the expected standard!

This conviction need not lead us to any frustration or despair, but boost us into greater striving and hope : "*Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit*". This is His promise. He will not retract from it a bit; He is faithful to the very letter of His promise.

If so, the most fundamental thing every one needs to do is to remain in Him to the extent of becoming like Him. Today's second reading gives us a clearer answer: "*Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them*" (I Jn. 3:24). The way of keeping God's

commandments is also given there: “*And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us*” (I Jn. 3:23).

So, in order to produce fruit pleasing to God it is not enough to have received Baptism and to profess the faith externally, but one has to share in Christ’s life fully through grace and has to cooperate with Him in His work of redemption. That is to say, one has to live in Him and to imitate Him in everything. In practice it means, to surrender ourselves totally to Jesus and let Him rule our life in all respects. St. Peter puts it thus: “*Honor Christ as your Lord*” (I Pet. 3:15).

Besides, loving one another just as Jesus commanded is also necessary. If helping our less fortunate fellowmen to live a decent comfortable life is an act of real love, how much more is it an act of charity to help people lead to the life everlasting? Hence evangelization is the greatest act of fraternal charity. From this it is obvious that we shall not limit our acts of charity in doing some material help but we need to commit ourselves to the preaching the gospel every where, first of all, by following the gospel values strictly in our life style, and secondly by propagating the gospel truths wherever we can.

Jesus speaks of two categories of people those who, although they are still joined to the vine externally, yield no fruit; and those who do yield fruit but could yield more. If a person doesn’t strive for more, he will ultimately meet the same fate as that of the dead branches –to be burned in fire. This has parallel in some other images our Lord uses—the parables of the sound tree and bad tree (Mt. 7:15-20), the dragnet (Mt. 13:47), and the invitation to the wedding (Mt. 22:11-14) . Here is St. Augustine commenting on this passage: “ *The wood of the vine is more contemptible if it does not abide in the vine, and the more glorious if it does abide... For, being cut off it is profitable neither for the vine dresser nor for the carpenter. For one of these only is it useful—the vine or the fire. If it is not in the vine, it goes to the fire; to avoid going to the fire it must be joined to the vine*”.

In this parable Jesus also reveals the inherent advantage of suffering. Those who yield fruit, but not in plenty can be made more productive by pruning them. So the pains in life are not signs of being cut away from Christ, or the sign of being ignored by God, on the contrary, it is a sign of God's greater concern for us to enable us to bear much fruit. Since we are fundamentally united to Christ, as His branches, God will discipline us until we are able to bear abundant fruits to make our life glorious. “*I continuously discipline and punish every one I love; so I must punish you, unless you turn from your indifference and become enthusiastic about the things of God*” (Rev. 3”19)

Let us conclude this reflection by making a probe into the meaning of the last verse in the second reading: “*The way we know that Jesus remains in us is from the Spirit he gave in us*”. What does that mean? Here, St John reveals that whether or not Jesus remains in us and we in Him depends on whether or not we let the Holy Spirit be active in our life, giving Him full freedom to lead every aspect of our life according his discretions. This is exactly what the Blessed Virgin Mary did and Jesus remained in her. So the surest proof of Jesus’ remaining in us is the Holy Spirit’s action in us. It is simple logic that the Holy Spirit and the Fruits, Gifts and Charisms of the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Hence if we don’t keep deep respect, esteem and love for the Holy Spirit’s charisms and gifts or do not desire or pray for them or ignore them, we prove that we do not respect Him or allow Him to be the Lord of our life as we profess in the Creed.

Therefore , let us correct our indifferent or negative attitude to the often unintelligible manifestations and charisms of the Holy Spirit and humble ourselves to be open to them and seek them earnestly as the universal Church is going to prepare for the Feast of Pentecost shortly.