

GATHERED INSPIRED SENT



Jesus' teaching about the vine branches contains an important aspect of our faith. We need to be connected to the Lord if our discipleship of Jesus is to be authentic and our witness of faith to be vibrant and life-giving. This text of scripture has much for us to reflect on in light of the Easter mystery we continue to celebrate. This month's reflection on the vine and branches is offered by Fr. Paul M. Addison OSM, a British Servite friar from the Province of the Isles (The United Kingdom and Ireland).

Reflection on the Gospel of the Vine and the Branches - John 15:1-8

Perhaps the English word "prune" is distracting, because it also means a dried plum! But it is a vital, essential word in this passage of the Gospel. In Italian, the word is "potare", a sharper sounding word to represent the work of the vine-dresser. Yes, being "pruned" means being cut back, quite harshly, to enable the vine to grow new fruit-bearing branches.

Note carefully that Jesus says that his disciples are "pruned already" by means of the word that he has spoken to them. What is happening? The disciple is cut back, perhaps even stripped, of former wholeness and completeness, with a view to future growth. Stripped back how? Well, it may be like the religious vows where a disciple is called to go without possessions or family-life or personal freedom. It may

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Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away - he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples."

equally be the way unexpected sufferings strike a disciple, who must then turn the losses of suffering into new growth.

More precisely, the disciple who welcomes the word of Christ finds gradually that all values are relegated to a secondary place - such God-given values as wealth and success, beauty and health, family and social well-being... everything that can rightly seem so important is displaced to lesser importance as Christ becomes the central and dominant meaning for the disciple's whole life.

Perhaps the disciple does not need to make voluntary renunciation of any of those values. But there will always be a challenge coming from them, urging the disciple with the question, "Is wealth your dominant value? Or health? Or family and love? Or achievement and success?"

There will be times of excruciating loss: losing a loved one, or a position of security, even losing freedom itself, or losing health to a point of disability. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is hoped that such losses may be converted into spiritual growth.



Returning to the disciples listening to Jesus, they are told that the word of Jesus has already cut them back and pruned them. In the words of St Peter, they have “left everything to follow you”. The apostles have left their nets and their money-tables; the Mother and relatives have left the security of Nazareth to join the disciples (cf. end of Cana narrative). They are giving meaning to the phrase uttered by the Master, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God”.

faithful disciple can take heart from the Blessed Virgin Mary in this sense: “to suffer means to have something happen to you over which you have little control”, and Mary said, “let it be done to me according to your WORD!” She will help believers to cope with the pruning process of the Word of God.

Perhaps this is the moment for adding a positive note about being stripped and pruned. The “dying to self” expressed by these ideas is also a definition of what it

Questions for Reflection

1. **What is the dominant value in my life? Does it aid or hinder my following the Lord? How/Why?**
2. **What needs to be pruned in my life that I can honestly answer the Lord’s call? Why? How can I help the Lord in this?**

But pruning hurts, there is no doubt about that! And we can be understandably scared of the pain. Not many great saints are able, like St Therese of Lisieux, to say that they are happy to suffer. But the

means to love - to give yourself, to give yourself away, to put your life on the line. You resist putting yourself first and put the other(s) first. This is part of the self-emptying, self-giving required and shown by the Master. Whether it feels like you are giving yourself to God (possibly a rare feeling?), or giving yourself to others (more usual), you are empowered to see the value of every loss. Every loss, every suffering, is drawn into your self-giving. Every suffering, every trial requires new examination through the lens of love. And the losses and sufferings and trials keep coming; indeed, there seems to be more of them now that you are open to their positive meaning for your life. At no point can you say, “now I have given myself completely!” More giving will be required, more love, more self-emptying. When I found it all too daunting, and expressed this to someone who cared about me, that person simply advised, “Go on loving!” In the twists and turns of life the fundamental good advice is quite simple, “Go on loving!”



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