

The Holy Gospel According to Saint John **(Jn 15:1-8)**

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.
He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.
You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.
Remain in me, as I remain in you.
Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own
unless it remains on the vine,
so neither can you unless you remain in me.
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.
Anyone who does not remain in me
will be thrown out like a branch and wither;
people will gather them and throw them into a fire
and they will be burned.
If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.
By this is my Father glorified,
that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

The Gospel of the Lord.

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR B – April 28, 2024 - Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

“REMAIN IN THE LORD AND BEAR MUCH FRUIT”

People still believe that the ways of thinking of the two philosophies of East and West are inherently different, meaning that although they both seek to study the universe and humans, the East often follows a synthetic approach, while the West is more inclined towards theoretical analysis. However, recently people have realized that there are many possible similarities between the two philosophies, and one of those similarities is finding a combination between the two subjects to create something new.

Indeed, while Eastern philosophy sought explanations around the two principles of *yin* and *yang* combined to create all things, the West - specifically Kant and Hegel - built a dialectical method: problem, antithesis topic, then combine the problem to form a new topic and so on. In short, it means there are always two different subjects, combining and forming a new thing.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's readings of God's Word revolve around two conditions of the Christian faith life, which is to “combine” with God and thereby “bear” abundant fruit:

- The first reading, the Acts of the Apostles, tells the story of how, after being converted, Saint Paul went to Jerusalem to “unite” with the apostles, then went to preach to the Gentiles ...
- The responsorial song is the last part of Psalm 22, talking about everyone returning to God, and from there talking about God to future generations... (see Ps. 22: 28, 31).
- The second reading, the first letter of the apostle John, speaks of “abiding” in God (see 1 John 24).

- And especially in the Gospel according to Saint John, Jesus clearly said: *“Whoever remains in me and I in him, he bears much fruit”* (John 15:5). To illustrate this, Jesus used the image of a vine and branches, in which the branches must be united with the trunk in order to bear fruit.

Thus, “Remaining” and “bearing fruit” are two conditions of religious life that Christians must have. In the parlance of natural sciences, these are two necessary and sufficient conditions. Remaining united in God is a necessary condition, but there must also be a sufficient condition of bearing fruit for God.

1. Remain in Jesus.

When people love each other, they want to stay together, become one with each other, unite their hearts and minds with each other. Likewise, Christians who love God must abide in Him.

However, **how to stay in God?** We have Jesus' teachings: *“Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him”* (John 6: 56). Another place Jesus also said: *“Whoever loves me will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and my Father and I will come and make their home in him”* (John 14: 23). Thus, remaining in Jesus means receiving the Eucharist and living the Word of God.

+ Stay in the Eucharist of God

Like the human body, as long as it feels good to eat, can be digested, and the food is circulated and transformed into flesh and blood and nutrients to nourish the body, the person will be healthy and develop, and vice versa, if at some point, the body no longer wants to eat, or the food cannot be digested anymore, then watch out, the body will weaken, get sick and die.

Likewise, when the soul still desires to receive the Eucharist and unite with Jesus to become one with each other, the soul will be healthy and grow in virtue. On the contrary, when the soul moves away from the Eucharist, or receives it superficially and the Eucharist is no longer the source of vitality and transformation for that soul, then that soul is slowly dying of its own volition. And so, instead of remaining in God, that soul seeks to remain in creatures. For example:

- A priest or monk who is no longer passionate about the Eucharist, no longer united with Jesus as his love, will also no longer love the community, and then they will seek to stay in an object other than God and the community, gradually leading to loss of calling.
- A wife or husband, when they are no longer attached to God and become one with each other in the effectiveness of the sacrament of marriage, will seek to stay in another object, and will go to betrayal and death. initial love.
- A Christian, when he only lives a superficial religious life, does not enthusiastically attend Mass and no longer enthusiastically prepares his heart to receive the Lord's Eucharist, his religious life will fade away. They will soon become believers – in name but not in reality.

When the vine branch is cut off from the tree, it will certainly wither and die, because the life sap of the vine branch is not self-existing but is the life sap that is transmitted from tree to branch. When using this image of the vine - branches, Jesus affirms the existence of God and the existence of humans. Only God exists, and humans only exist and depend on God's life.

+ Stay in God's Word

We still remember the story of Mary Magdalene, even though in her time of grief, she cried a lot, her eyesight was so blurred that she thought Jesus was the gardener, but when she heard the voice of God calling her name, she recognized her immediately. That is, when people love, they recognize each other's sounds, even each other's breathing, coughing, voice, footsteps...

If the Eucharist is the "giving of oneself" - the sacramental giving of oneself to the object of one's love - between God (the Bridegroom) and humanity, then the Word of God is a "love letter" that is the words of The One Who is Love for His Bride is the Christian.

Therefore, if Christians say they stay in God without loving the Word and listening to the Word, it is truly flawed, because Jesus affirmed: "Whoever loves me will keep my WORDS". (Jn. 14: 23). For example:

– When a priest or monk no longer loves the Word of God, does not know how to use the Word of God as a guideline for their life, no longer knows how to obey the teachings of their superiors and does not listen to each other, they will look for "listening" " another object outside. As a result, they will live separate from the community, like tree branches separated from the trunk.

– When spouses and children no longer know how to listen to God's Word and no longer know how to listen to each other, the atmosphere and space in the family will become stuffy. They will seek sympathy from someone else. As a result, the family will fall apart.

– Being a Christian who does not love the Word of God and wants not to listen to the Word of the One he worships is clear, more or less - sooner or later, the soul will easily distance itself from God, will easily separate from unity. communicate with the parish and with others.

It is a pity that today, most young people are Christians, know a lot of information about movie stars or singers, but cannot remember the name of a saint who wrote the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual life of each Christian will no longer exist when separated from Jesus Christ who is "life" as He once declared: "*I am The Life*". Thus, there cannot be any Christian who does not associate with Jesus, especially drawing His life from the Eucharist and the Word of God.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Those are two ways to stay in God. But just remaining in God is just a very necessary but not enough condition, it must also bear fruit.

2. Bear fruit.

Jesus affirmed: "What glorifies the Father is that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Indeed, the function of a vine branch is not to be bare or leafy, but to bear fruit, good fruit, not bad fruit, otherwise it must be cut off to avoid harming the tree and its health. other branches. The function of Christians is to create merit and good deeds, to develop the Church. Bearing much fruit has the most basic meaning of expanding the Kingdom of God in this world.

In fact, the way to follow God is not only from outside to enter the holy temple of Jerusalem in joy, but also to join God from within the city of Jerusalem towards Calvary in the sacrifice of the cross:

- Because religious life is not only about clasping hands in prayer but also about working, living and doing liturgical work that has redemptive value to bring blessings to the world.
- Because when we go on a pilgrimage, then when we return to live with our family and return to our duties, we will become better to ourselves, bearing more fruits of virtue in our relationship with God and with others. everybody.
- Our life of faith does not stop at church, but must go out from church to life and testify to God in our duties with love and charity.

Therefore, if grape branches want to bear fruit, they must be nourished with life sap - drawn from the tree trunk and must be pruned by the gardener. The same is true of our Christian faith life. It requires combining and drawing from the tree of life, Jesus, and at the same time being pruned with daily sacrifices to cooperate with God to bear the fruit of salvation for ourselves and for others.

Grape branches that do not bear fruit: There are grape branches that still draw sap from the tree, but only produce leaves. That is the situation of people who only care about themselves, enjoy God's blessings but do not share them with others, especially lacking the spirit of charity and sharing in living a missionary life.

Grape branches that do not bear good fruit: There are grape branches that do not bear good fruit because they cannot absorb enough nutrients from the tree or are bitten by insects due to life's adversities. That's when we are superficial with God's grace.

In short, the life of faith for all Christians is to remain in God and bear spiritual fruit for the Church and for ourselves.

Lord Jesus, please help us to always remain in You through union with You each day through participating in the Eucharist and meditating on Your Word, so that we can bear fruit for You and for the Church. May we, every day and every event, grow in gratitude to You Lord God, cooperate with You, to bring many souls back to You. Amen.