

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

John 15:4a, 5b

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord.

Whoever remains in me will bear much fruit.

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel**

John 15:1-8; L53B

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.”**

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Today and next Sunday the gospel readings are from the Last Supper discourse of John. Chronologically, the Last Supper took place before Jesus's death and resurrection, yet we hear them after Easter. This is a reminder that we are not remembering and celebrating events in their strict historical sequence, but that we are immersed in a liturgical mix of time and timelessness; we are celebrating the mystery that is always and everywhere the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. As we listen to the Johannine account of the last meal of Jesus with his

disciples, we are, here and now, at the table with Jesus and the community of disciples, tangling our lives with him, the true vine, and with the branches of all the baptized.

We hear much shouting of would-be people of power: fanatical tyrants, political agitators, self-righteous politicians. We may even add to this chorus our own small voices on matters personal, ecclesial, or social. But what Jesus speaks about at table is the power of love and of gentle growth. He gives us another image of the great intimacy and interdependence that exists between himself, his Father, and his disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower”—and we are the branches.



The vine and vineyard were familiar images to the people of God in the Old Testament. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt and planted by God the vine grower in its own soil (Ps 80:8-13). So significant was the image of the vine that on one facade of the Jerusalem temple sanctuary was carved an ornamental vine with golden clusters of grapes as big as a human hand. And the early Christian community painted the vine on the walls of the catacombs in memory of Christ, the true vine.

The image of the vine is a radically nonhierarchical image of the people of God, for all the branches are so intertwined that when looking at a vine it is almost impossible to tell where one branch begins and another ends. All tangle together as they grow from the central stock, undifferentiated by anything but their fruitfulness. Such is the relationship of Jesus to the new community that grows from his death and resurrection. Such communities are also to be branching out, hospitable communities that live by and bear fruit through the surging sap of Christ's risen life.

To remain healthy and productive the vine must be pruned by our vine grower God. Those in whom the baptismal sap rises have already been pruned by the words Jesus speaks, but we must continue to accept not only the short, sharp pain of God's snipping from our lives the small and withering infidelities, but also be willing to endure the longer agony of more drastic pruning that is sometimes necessary. This is not to make of the Vine Grower a ruthless tyrant, because what is done is done out of love for the vine. In his passion and death, the Christ who knew no sin was made sin for us (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), and suffered in faithful hope that most drastic pruning of his passion and death so that the branches of the vine, his community, might thrive through his resurrected life.

Sometimes what needs to be pruned in our lives is the parasite runner of individualism that wants to go its own way, or the sucker that feeds on self-interest; both draw life away from the vine. At other times, our vine-dressing God recognizes our potential for greater fruit-bearing, and with this the need for heavy pruning. After such pruning, a vine may bear no fruit for several years, but it remains rooted and waiting, confident in the tending of the Vine Grower, until both are rewarded with a tremendous, bursting yield. When we yield such a harvest of good works, says Jesus, we give glory to the Father and are confirmed in our discipleship.

### **Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** “I am the vine, you are the branches.”

**To the point:** Last week we pondered the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who tenderly cares for his sheep. This week we are given a new image in order to explore our relationship with the Lord, that of a vine and branches. Unlike a shepherd and his sheep, a vine and its branches cleave to each other in such a way that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins. This is the closeness Jesus desires to have with each of us—that his life-giving Spirit might flow from him to us as effortlessly as the sap of a healthy vine plant flows through the veins of the branch, allowing it to produce fruit.

### **Connecting the Gospel**

**to the second reading:** In both the gospel and the second reading from St. John we are given a commandment over and over again: to “remain” in Jesus. Using the image of the true vine, Jesus likens his faithful disciples to branches securely connected to their parent plant. In remaining on the vine they are able to bear fruit, but separated from him they become like branches removed from the plant—without the nutrients brought up from the roots of the vine, they wither.

**to experience:** Today’s gospel invites us to consider how we “remain” in Jesus, the true vine. The second reading from St. John, however, offers us one way to discern our own “remaining.” He writes, “Those who keep [Jesus’s] commandments, remain in him, and he in them.” Instead of thinking of a laundry list of rules when considering the commandments, there is really only one St. John proposes that encompasses all others: the command to “love one another.”

### **Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** In today’s first reading we continue on with the saga of the early church recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, this time focusing on Paul’s journey of faith. In a shocking and dramatic conversion, Paul goes from persecutor of Christians to an apostle of Jesus. Though the other apostles are first afraid to accept him into their midst, they are finally convinced of his change of heart when they hear stories and witness his bold preaching “in the name of the Lord.” The responsorial psalm is an apt description of Paul, eager to praise the Lord “in the assembly of your people.” We can imagine Paul praying the final verse, “[T]o him my soul shall live,” as he dedicates his life to preaching the gospel and sharing with others the salvation he has received.

**to psalmist preparation:** Within the assembly of God’s people, you are blessed to proclaim the praises of the Lord. At this moment in time, where do you find the most joy in your ministry?

### **PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

In reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples are at first fearful of Saul. On your journey as a Christian, who have you befriended whom you otherwise wouldn’t have known or associated with?

St. John writes, “[L]et us love not in word or speech / but in deed and truth.” In following Jesus’s command to love others, where do your words not match your actions?

In today’s gospel, the command to “remain” in Jesus is issued more than the exhortation to “bear fruit.” What spiritual practices help you to “remain” rooted on the true vine?

What “fruits” are evident in yourself, your family, your community that give glory to God?