

Homily
May 18 2022
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I begin my homily with the lyrics from an old hymn, Abide with Me. I think it captures the essence of today's Gospel:

- Abide with me. Fast falls the eventide, the darkness deepens. Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, help of the helpless, abide with me.
- I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless. Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness. Where is death's sting? I triumph still if Thou abide with me.
- Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes. Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven's morning breaks and earth's shadows flee. In life and death O Lord abide with me. Abide with me. Abide with me.

Henry Francis Lyle and William Henry Monk. 1861

Since I never lived in the country or on farmland, I was curious about vinedressers. It is a well-known fact that grapes are used for winemaking. Vinedressers also oversee and tend to grapes to keep them healthy for us to simply enjoy eating as a delicious fruit. If some of the vines are lying on the ground, the leaves get covered with mud and dust – not very conducive to producing grapes, so the vinedresser repositions the branches on a trellis so they can produce.

In today's Gospel we learn that the natural world of animals, plants and other things existing in nature spoke to Jesus about the words and work of God. Out of the blue a memory came back to me about plants. I loved to have a plant in my office and home, so I purchased seedlings, placed them in my pots, covered the roots with soil and watered them daily. Regrettably, I watered them too much and they drowned and died. I learned a lesson about my life. I was doing too much – more work, more running around with more things to do. I had too many irons in the fire. I was burning the candle at both ends.

The pivotal question was where was God in my life? How often did I just stop to be still, to simply enjoy time with God? God replied: "I never leave. I'm always here. I'm waiting for you to come and just BE with me. Make your home in me as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear fruit by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you cannot bear fruit unless you are joined with me."

The other thing to note is that Jesus says, "everyone that does bear fruit is pruned so that it bears more fruit." This is a challenge! To prune is to cut back, clip, snip, shear anything and everyone in our lives that might impede, obstruct, or get in the way of our faithful connection with the words and teachings of Jesus. While pruning may be painful, it is not a sign of God's displeasure. On the contrary, pain may be a sign that God is still working to mold and shape our lives to become the best we can be. It may mean we need to discard certain relationships or certain attachments to things. I ask myself; do I have the courage to be pruned? Do I trust the Pruner?

Some ponderings

- How do I stay connected to the True Vine without whom I can do nothing?
- Is there anyone or anything that keeps me from God? What can I do about it?
- Am I united to the Vine that gives me life or am I a dead branch that is incapable of bearing fruit and giving witness?
- Have you had an experience of being pruned?
- In the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, the words “bear fruit” are used 5 or 6 times, what does it mean for you to bear fruit? You may wish to revisit Matthew Chapters 5-7 and Luke 6-7.

REMEMBER THE SACRED WORDS...ABIDE WITH ME