

Homily based on the Gospel of John 15: 1-8

- One of the scariest times in my life was when my doctor told me I would need major surgery. There was an immediate onset of fear, anxiety and confusion. I did a lot of praying leading up to the day of the surgery. The one prayer I kept coming back to was “ Lord, walk with me”.
- I remember clearly the morning of the surgery. After leaving my wife in the waiting area, I was led down a long narrow corridor and into the operating room full of doctors, nurses and robotic equipment.
- But my clearest memory of that morning however was not what I saw, but what I felt - the feeling of God walking with me down that corridor to the operating room –holding my hand. I am still amazed that I didn’t turn and run. But there was a strange calmness an absence of terror!
- Perhaps you have experienced something similar in your life.
- A time you faced something frightening or difficult or confusing. A time when you couldn’t imagine how you could face or get through that situation. Maybe it was an illness; or loss of a love one. Or perhaps you faced a life changing decision: a new job or a move.
- But then there was this unexpected moment of calm, or courage or clarity that allowed you to face the difficulty. Maybe that moment came by way of a thought, a memory, a feeling. Maybe

through the words or presence of someone. The manner in which that calm or courage or clarity arrives will vary – but the source is always the same.

- Our Gospel reading this Sunday reminds us we are not alone. We belong to God. He created us. He loves and cares for us. We are intimately connected to God. And if we remain connected we can face the toughest challenges and we can do wonderful things. Jesus reminds us of this when He says: *“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”*
- In Saint John’s Gospel, which we read from again today, Jesus uses many different titles and images to describe himself. “I am the bread of life” he says. “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the Way, the truth, and the life”.
- There are eight of these “I AM” statements found in John’s Gospel. Last week, we heard Jesus say, “I am the Good Shepherd”. And on this fifth Sunday of Easter, Jesus tells us, “I am the vine, you are the branches”
- Notice how all of these “I Am” statements requires a response from us. If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we must *follow* where he shepherds; If Jesus is the Truth, we must *believe* what he teaches; If He is the Bread of Life, we must *eat* what he feeds us with. Today, Jesus even tells us

the response we must have; he is the vine, we are branches, and we must *remain attached* to him, so that we may *bear* fruit.

- Let's look closely at this image. A branch totally depends upon its connection to the vine: for nutrients, for water, and life itself. If it is not attached to its main source of life, it will not bear fruit, it will die.
- The same sap that runs through the vine gives life to the branches and causes the fruit to grow. When we are united to Christ, God's grace, God's own divine life flows through Christ and into us.
- Jesus presents us with this image to teach a profound truth. We are totally dependent on God. Only with God's grace can we face the challenges; find true peace and bear the "good fruit" we are called produce in this life.
- What is a successful life? It's not about having a perfectly landscaped lawn, a fancy car, season tickets, or a room full of plaques and trophies as proof of our earthly accomplishments.
- The successful life is one that bears much fruit through its union with Jesus Christ, and ends with being judged worthy of heaven.
- What is the fruit that Jesus is talking about here? St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians lists some of the spiritual fruits that come from being in a living relationship with Jesus: "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, courage, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

- These fruits are the signs that we are united to the Lord. And the Lord doesn't say, "today, bear some of these, if you really feel up to it." He says that we must remain in him so we continually bear MUCH FRUIT, and if we don't we will wither. If we are not bearing all those fruits listed by St. Paul, then maybe we are not as united to Jesus Christ as we should be.
- So, the question is, HOW do we stay united to the vine in order to may bear much fruit and be judged worthy of eternal life?
- First, staying united to the vine means constantly growing in our prayer life. Prayer is how our souls are exposed to the divine sunlight. Just as plants need constant exposure to sunlight for energy, so we need constant expose to God through prayer.
- Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta urged Christians to make time every day to listen to God in silent prayer. She taught that listening to God in prayer was the very first link in the sacred chain of charity and interior peace. She said: The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace..."
- All the noise and distraction and business in our lives must be countered by intentional moments of silent prayer. We need to make time for prayer every day: Read and reflect on scripture daily, make visits to the adoration chapel in our Church throughout the week, pray the rosary.

- Pope Francis is a great devotee of the rosary, and said, “I urge everyone in this month of May to pray the prayer of the Holy Rosary.” The Month of May is dedicated to Mary. Mary always helps our souls to be open to God, as she was, totally open, totally faithful. She truly bore much fruit. So, we can invoke the intercession of Mary every day for the Lord to grant mercy and peace and grace to our soul, to the Church and to the world.
- Secondly, "remaining in Christ" means making good use of the sacraments, most especially the sacraments of the Eucharist and confession. If a branch gets damaged in a windstorm, the gardener knows that the branch needs to be reattached to the vine or the branch will die. And that's precisely what happens in the Sacrament of Confession: Jesus binds up and heals that connection with him that our sin has damaged or broken.
- And in the Eucharist, our union with Christ is strengthened more powerfully than at any other time—we receive an influx of grace like no other.
- Thirdly, remaining on the vine requires loving obedience to God's Holy Will. This is what St John refers to in today's Second Reading, when he writes: "Children, let us not love one another in word or in speech, but in deed and truth."
- St. John reminds us that staying connected to the vine requires bearing and providing fruit for others. In other words, following Jesus, isn't just

about calling oneself a Christian, it is about being a Christian. Taking on the teachings and attitudes of Jesus and living them out! Reaching out in love and care and service to others. It's easy to talk the talk of being a good Catholic. But that talk has to translate into good works, honesty, purity, faithfulness, courage, self-sacrifice, and obedience to all Church teaching.

- These things: Prayer, the sacraments, and loving service to others keep us united to Christ, the true vine. They yield fruit that lasts for eternal life.
- When we seek to grow in these ways, our life begins to be charged with the presence of God. God's own divine life flows through Christ and into us – His branches that bring His loving presence into the world.