

In the Gospel for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, year B, Jesus teaches us in a most profound yet simple way what it means to be his disciple. Listen with the ears of your heart (as St. Benedict would say) to the parable of the vine and the branches:



*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. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. (John 15:1–10)*

Obviously, you could gain much by meditating on any one sentence of these life-giving words, but I will confine myself to concentrate on one central word: “Remain.” This word is used 11 times in the 10 versus copied above. The Latin word for “remain” is “*perseverantia*.” Pope Benedict XVI comments on the significance of this word in this parable:

What the Church Fathers call *perseverantia*—patient steadfastness in communion with the Lord amid all the vicissitudes of life—is placed center stage here. Initial enthusiasm is easy. Afterward, though, it is time to stand monotonous desert upon to traverse in this takes to tread evenly, a romanticism of the initial that only the deep, pure is the way to produce

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firm, even along the paths that we are called life—with the patience it patience in which the awakening subsides, so Yes of faith remains. This good wine.... If the fruit

we are to bear is love, its prerequisite is this “remaining,” which is profoundly connected with the kind of faith that holds on to the Lord and does not let go. Verse 7 speaks of prayer as an essential element of this remaining.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ch. 8 – *Vine and Wine*, p. 262)

So, we are called to remain in Christ, to remain in his love, to remain in his words in order to bear fruit, glorify God and become his disciples. This “remaining” means that patient steadfast communion with the Lord should be at the heart of all we do: the way we undergo our trials (prunings), the way we pray, the way we listen to his words, the way we obey his commandments, the way we hold to his love. And what is the alternative? “*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.*” Of course, Jesus desires NOT that any should be cast into the fire, yet he will not force us to embrace the life-giving truth and love that enable us to be one with God and find eternal bliss—the grace will be given, the choice remains ours.

-- Fr. Terry Staples