

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Sixth Sunday of Easter Gospel Word
John 15:9-17

This part of the Gospel according to John is full of warmth and challenge. At a Passover meal, participants drank four cups of wine. In this setting the images of vine, branches, grapes and wine would have been most clear, and would be pleasant images. Talk about growing vines and dressing vines at this point in the meal would be rich and serene. Jesus gives the images of the Father as the vinedresser and himself as the vine. A vinedresser worked with extreme care and caution. The image of the Father as a vinedresser is fully committed to bringing us to full bloom through his care. It is not a threat for the branches to either bear fruit or else. Rather, pruning will benefit the branches.

The invitation to abide in the presence of Jesus is extended here. Some translations invite the listener to remain with God through connection with Christ. What does this mean? Abiding or remaining with someone or in some place suggests that we are to stay with or live with that person or place. We abide on planet Earth. We remain in a certain country and in a specific place that we call home. In this case the branches abide through pruning. They stay put.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

When Jesus spoke these words toward the end of his earthly life, he was inviting his followers to know that the loving presence of God in him would be with us throughout our lives and until the end of time. Notice the words of the Gospel: *abide or remain* in my love. Those words make a big difference. At times, for some, the idea of God being present everywhere has an element of God being there to check up on us. God's omnipresence was like the video camera recording all activities. For some, this is not a consoling thought. Maybe that's why Jesus made sure that we knew that God's presence was a loving divine presence, right there with us, all the days and nights of our lives.

Ordinarily, we come to know God's presence through prayer and reflection. But we have to desire it, and quiet ourselves within. And that's not easy with all the others demands and needs that we face every day. Personal prayer is an essential requirement for those wanting to know the immediate presence of God's love. Sometimes we are helped to do this by taking some quiet time and reading slowly, maybe a few times, rich Gospel passages like the one for this Sunday, and allowing the words to wash over us, so we can appropriate their reality for ourselves. Hearing them proclaimed during the Sunday Eucharist is helpful, but for most, this is not enough to have the words really sink into our soul. There's an ancient practice in the Church called *lectio divina* or godly reading. This involves taking a passage (or even just a short phrase or word) and letting the word of God penetrate deep within us.

In the midst of our busy lives, the practice of quiet prayer is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Personal and work related duties can fill our days to the brim, leaving little room for anything else. We become so involved in what we need and want that we can forget those who are our fellow journeyers. Without prayer, our lives can lose their spiritual dimension or meaning. All too easily we forget that we have a spiritual life. Any sense of God's abiding Spirit in others or us seems to vanish. We forget that we are loved intensely by God every step of our way and we forget that we are called to spread that same love to others.

The harder life becomes, the more we need to be aware of God as the caring vinedresser. Rich fruit ripens in our lives when we are able to believe that "pruning" times are not times of threat. They are times of benefit and grace.

One-line Prayer

God the Son, let us remember always that we live in your loving presence. Amen.