



João Paulo Rodrigues

Jesus with His disciples - Basilica of Our Lady of Nazareth, Belém (Brazil)

## ✠ GOSPEL ✠

Jesus said to His disciples:  
<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine grower.  
<sup>2</sup>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.  
<sup>3</sup>You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.  
<sup>4</sup>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.  
<sup>5</sup>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.  
<sup>6</sup>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.  
<sup>7</sup>If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.  
<sup>8</sup>By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples” (Jn 15:1-8).

# *The Best Way to Remain in Jesus*

In the true vine there is a sublime conduit through which the sap of grace flows abundantly to us, without risk of being lost.



**Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP**

## **I – SYMBOL OF OUR UNION WITH JESUS**

As we turn the pages of the Gospels, we come across many analogies used by Our Lord Jesus Christ in speaking of himself with the Apostles and the people. After the multiplication of the loaves, for example, He reveals himself to the crowds as “the Bread of Life” (Jn 6:35); later, in a discussion with the Pharisees, He declares himself to be “the Light of the world” (Jn 8:12); in the famous metaphor of the sheepfold, He presents himself as the door (cf. Jn 10:9), and on the same occasion He affirms: “I am the Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11).

In the passage from St. John selected for the Liturgy of the 5th Sunday of Easter, we find the Divine Master in the intimate circle of His disciples, setting before them the beautiful image of the vine whose grower is the Father.

To adequately understand this passage, we must analyse it through God’s prism, as He sees all things in himself with complete perfection. Being eternal, He is outside of time and constantly contemplates, in the perpetual present, all that has happened, is happening and will happen.

From this perspective, we can conclude that Our Lord chose the figure of the vine for a higher

reason: Knowing from all eternity the union that the Son would establish with men when He became incarnate, the Father created this plant not only with a view to the Eucharist, but also to symbolize the dynamism of the supernatural life that His Only Begotten would bestow on them.

This is the marvellous reality described by the Redeemer in the verses of this Sunday’s Gospel, which amount to one of the most beautiful theological treatises ever written on the mystery of grace.

## **II – WE DEPEND ON JESUS AND SHOULD REMAIN IN HIM**

In the first part of chapter 14 of St. John’s Gospel, recalled in last week’s Liturgy, Our Lord stressed the importance of faith and assured His disciples: “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (14:3).

On hearing these words, they most likely imagined that the Master would return physically, and then they would accompany Him again as they were doing at that moment; however, Jesus’ words had a different meaning.

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The Saviour will remain with us “to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20), fulfilling this promise in various ways, such as in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in pontifical infallibility, and in the sanctity that pervades the history of the Church, consummated in souls confirmed in grace. Nevertheless, the fundamental way in which He perpetuates His presence among us is the one explained in today’s Gospel.

*There are also false vines...*

Jesus said to His disciples: <sup>1</sup> “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine grower.”

Anyone who has had the opportunity to observe the development of a vine has doubtless noticed how, with a certain nobility and distinction, it grows, bears flowers and then fruits. The circulation of the sap cannot be seen, but it is what imparts the vigour of the stems, the leaves and the flowers that will later give way to clusters of grapes. When this flow is interrupted, life ceases.

It is the same with regard to Jesus: the Man-God is the vine on which all the baptized are born and on which they depend. And the office of vine-dresser is attributed to the Father, for it was He who sent the Son into the world to save us, making Him our Mediator, so that we might receive from His fullness “grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16).

Among other ideas, the expression “true vine” suggests the existence of false vines. In fact, the devil would not be the devil – and the same assessment applies to man with regard to his evil inclinations – if he were not constantly inventing paths on the fringes of truth, deviating in substantial points from the true Faith.

We need only leaf through the Gospel to see how many false vines Our Lord had before Him, in the person of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes who, lacking the vitality of grace, restricted their relationship with God to the practice of a few norms and rules of conduct. In this vein, we may recall the sentence emitted by the Redeemer on one occasion when the disciples informed Him that the Pharisees had been scandalized by Him: “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up” (Mt 15:13).

*Supernatural sterility*

<sup>2a</sup> “He takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit...”

It is curious to note that, before speaking of fruit, Jesus mentions cutting.

If the cultivator notices, attached to the vine, a branch that is green but always sterile next to others laden with fruit, he concludes that there is no lack of vital energy in the sterile branch, but a bad use of it. It then becomes indispensable to eliminate it in order to avoid wasting the sap, which can be better used by the other branches.

The soul regenerated by Baptism is in a similar situation. It has been incorporated into Our Lord and thereby enjoys an abundance of grace; but if it is self-centred and begins to make use of the gifts it has received to subsist in an egoistic fashion, without concern for the good of its neighbour or for the expansion of Christ’s Kingdom on earth, it will sooner or later be cut off.

In what does this just action of the Father consist? The graces, which once flowed profusely, diminish in intensity. And although He never fails to provide the soul with the graces necessary for salvation, such is human misery that this aid becomes insufficient to persevere in virtue and to attain sanctity.

*The Father prunes those who correspond to grace*

<sup>2b</sup> “...and every one that does He prunes so that it bears more fruit.”

An important stage in vine cultivation is the pruning of fruitful branches, which requires effort, attention and acuity from the grower. At appropriate intervals, it is necessary to remove, by means of a suitable instrument, the excess of shoots and other outgrowths that are useless or detrimental to the plant, such as the small spiral filaments, called tendrils, which tend to abound on the stems.

Similar is the Father’s procedure with generous souls who seek to correspond to grace and deepen their union with Christ. In order to purify them of their self-love, caprices and other defects, the Lord instigates situations of struggle, shaking them with suffering. Temptations, disasters or illnesses, if faced with love, dispose the soul to receive more graces and thus bear excellent fruit.

In a broader sense, the persecutions which throughout history have arisen against the good, setting them in conflict with evil and prompting them to defend the truth, are part of this divine diplomacy. God permits these events in order to

*The expression “true vine” suggests the existence of false vines, such as those Our Lord had before Him*



From left to right: Job - Church of Sainte-Segolène, Metz (France); St. Joan of Arc being judged Church of Notre-Dame la Grande, Poitiers (France) and King St. Louis in the Crusades Church of St. Saturnina, Baurech (France)

purify the faith of His elect and, after each battle, He brings forth greater wonders in the Holy Church.

***Purified by the word of Jesus***

<sup>3</sup> “You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.”

To reassure His disciples, perhaps alarmed at the idea of being “pruned”, Our Lord reveals the purifying power of His word when received with faith and enthusiasm. Whether by direct warnings or only by subtle insinuations, He had removed from their souls countless stumbling blocks during those three years of formation. Now they were already pruned and fruitful, because they had adhered to the Good News and had demonstrated it by their deeds. Realizing that they were fishers, no longer of fish, but of men, they had abandoned the merely earthly plane on which they were living and had launched themselves into the apostolate.

It is worth emphasizing that the word of the Divine Master had pruned them not only through admonishments but also by enlightening their intelligence with the transmission of principles, by which they came to know God better and to contemplate as-yet-unknown aspects of the Faith.

***A profound supernatural reality***

<sup>4a</sup> “Remain in Me, as I remain in you.”

As is proper to plants, the vine never fails to draw from the soil the necessary nutrients to supply each of its branches with sap.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God Incarnate, possesses within himself the infinitude of goodness, of truth and of beauty; therefore, graces from Him will never be lacking to sustain and sanctify us. Moreover, He is always disposed to remain in us, on the sole condition that we desire to remain in Him.

It is notable that the word “remain” is repeated eight times in today’s Gospel – such is Our Lord’s effort to demonstrate the importance of our union with Him. More than a mystical marriage, this profound spiritual reality is almost a fusion, like iron that merges with fire in the forge. It could be described as an insertion of ourselves into the Sacred Heart of Jesus and, at the same time, an insertion of Jesus into our own heart.

***No one can obtain merits on his own***

<sup>4b</sup> “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.”

The expression “bear fruit” in this verse does not refer to concrete works of piety or apostolate, but has another scope.

Even if driven into the ground or placed in a vase of water, a detached branch no longer bene-

*The Lord instigates situations of struggle, shaking with suffering those who seek to correspond with grace and deepen their union with Christ*

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fits from the vital sustenance provided by the vine. Unable to bear fruit, it soon withers and dries up.

Such is the situation of one who is divorced from Our Lord – sadly, not a very uncommon phenomenon in history. As much as a person in this state may pray and sacrifice, he can obtain no merit, for this consists in transferring the merits of Jesus Christ to us, His branches. If communication with the Source of graces is lacking, it becomes impossible to “bear fruit” in the supernatural field.

Let us recall the commentary of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort<sup>1</sup> on the Blessed Virgin, who gave more glory to God with the least of her actions than St. Lawrence did at the moment of his martyrdom. No one remained in Jesus as Our Lady did, and for this reason any gesture of hers surpassed in merit the greatest heroic feats of the Saints.

### ***True productivity***

<sup>5</sup> “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.”

When we see a vine laden with grapes, we tend to consider that the branches from which the clusters hang are the cause of the success of the production. However, the fruit is produced by the vine and not by the branch, which is only a channel for the transmission of the sap.

We fall into a similar error when we attribute the good success of an apostolic endeavour to the mere efforts of those who carried it out, forgetting that if there is “much fruit,” it is due in the first place to Him who is humility and who wishes to fill us with glory through His own gifts.

After incisively reaffirming His remaining in us as a corollary of our remaining in Him, the Divine Master explains the principle of true productivity in one succinct phrase: “Without Me you can do nothing.” He does not say “you can do little,” or “you will never do much,” but uses an absolute term: “you can do nothing.” In fact, outside the state of grace, the soul is incapable of making a simple Sign of the Cross with merit.

### ***The punishment or reward based on our remaining in Jesus***

<sup>6</sup> “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.”

Throughout today’s Gospel, Our Lord is addressing those souls who already know and love Him, of whom He is asking a further step in surrender and fidelity: “Remain in Me”. In this context, the clear allusion to eternal condemnation in the above verse is striking. Such is the fate of those who have experienced the delights of grace, but at a certain moment rejected them, preferring to embrace sin. If there is no repentance and amendment, they will be cast out after death into an “unquenchable fire” (Mk 9:43).

Entirely different is the promise made to those who persevere, one of the most categorical statements of Sacred Scripture:

<sup>7</sup> “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.”

When we remain in Jesus and His words remain in us through the practice of the Commandments, our will is in complete harmony with His will. For this reason, the Redeemer sets no limits to our supplications, but says: “Ask for whatever you want.” In other words, whatever we desire in the line of holiness and perfection will always be in conformity with His wishes and, therefore, will be granted. How many times in our lives we have seen the fulfilment of this divine promise!

If Our Lord invests our petitions with this character of omnipotence, there is no reason for us to hold back in our intentions. For His glory, we must have great aspirations! And to anyone who might think our attitude overly ambitious or bold, we may reply with St. Therese of the Child Jesus:

“I look upon myself as a weak little bird, with only a light down as covering. I am not an eagle, but I have only an eagle’s *eyes* and *heart*. In spite of my extreme littleness I still dare to gaze upon the Divine Sun, the Sun of Love, and my heart feels within it all the aspirations of an eagle.”<sup>8</sup> He who desires much, obtains much; he who desires little, obtains little!

### ***Jesus seeks to glorify the Father***

<sup>8</sup> “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples.”



The Blessed Virgin Mary in glory with Our Lord Jesus Christ  
Cappella della Madonna in the Benedictine Monastery of Subiaco (Italy)

This is Our Lord's main objective in convincing us of the need to remain in Him: the glory of the Father. Understanding our condition as branches of the Vine, from which we were born and upon which we absolutely depend, it will be easier for us to become disciples. This implies not only learning from the Divine Master, but deeply observing who He is and how He acts, loving what He loves and treading the same paths that He trod, allowing ourselves to be pruned and shaped by the Father.

Today's Liturgy offers us an example of this perfect discipleship in the figure of St. Paul, contemplated in the first reading (cf. Acts 9:26-31). From being a persecutor of Christians and collaborator in the death of many of them, including St. Stephen, Saul turned to fervent enthusiasm for Our Lord after a spectacular grace of conversion. He bore much fruit because he remained in Jesus, as his words attest: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

### III – GOD LOVES MEDIATIONS!

God loves the principle of mediation, through which He created the unequal and hierarchical universe. He loves it so much that, with the Incarnation, the Son became the Mediator between us and the Father, just as Mary Most Holy was made our Mediatrix with Christ.

Never has humanity needed this mediation more than at the present time. When the Apos-

tle complained to Our Lord about the thorn from which he wished to be delivered, He replied: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). We might well affirm that the full manifestation of this power was waiting for the moment when human misery would reach the extreme point at which we find it today.

In order for mankind is to emerge from this state and to constitute the era of the greatest holiness in history, a strong mediation is indispensable. This is the role of Our Lady as the conduit chosen by God to bring the sap of grace to all of us, branches of the vine and His children.

If we were to compare the marvels of the Church's past with the wonders that will ensue from Marian intercession, we would see that there have been, at the most, beautiful flowers, but the fruits will only appear now.

On this 5th Sunday of Easter, let us ask for the grace to never cease to benefit from the divine sap, and to attain total permanence in Jesus, so that He too may remain in us through Mary. ✧

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge*, n.222. In: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Du Seuil, 1966, p.638.

<sup>2</sup> ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX. *Les manuscrits autobiographiques*. Manuscrit B. In: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Du Cerf; Desclée de Brouwer, 2009, p.216.