

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Are we **in** an intimate union with Christ? Or are we dying spiritually? I will ask again. Are we **in** an intimate union with Christ? Or are we dying spiritually? These are the two questions that the Gospel is asking us today.

In the Old Testament, the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Psalmists, all used the image of a vine, or vineyard, to represent the Chosen People of God. However, the Old Testament vine, was only a shadow of what was to come. Now today, Jesus is using the image of a vine, to say that **he** and his disciples, will form the **new** chosen people of God. He is saying that **he** is the true vine, the vine that will bear fruit.

Jesus frequently stresses that he is only the **instrument** used by his Father. And his success, as a vine, depends on his Father, who is the vinedresser, who planted the good vine and cares for it. He says that useless branches are lopped off and the fruit bearing branches, are pruned so that they will produce **more** fruit.

Under this image of a vine, and its branches, Jesus is describing the intimate union, that **must** exist, between him and his followers. He warns them, that as branches, they will wither and die unless they remain attached, that is, remain united with him, the vine. But as branches, they **have** been pruned already because the Revelation of God which he has already given them, has cleansed them of useless growths.

He then warns them, that no totally human act, can have any beneficial value for eternal life. However, if the act is done under the influence of grace then it **can**, and **is**, effective. But if they turn their back on grace then they will be cut off from the life-giving vine and therefore they will wither and die. For they will die spiritually. However, rewardingly, the disciple who remains in intimate union with Christ, will have every request that he makes, in prayer, granted. However, their prayers must always be according to the will of God. And, if they are united with Christ the vine, and by doing good works, and producing fruit, then they will add to God's external glory.

This is what Jesus taught his disciples but what is the Holy Spirit telling us today as we listen to the Gospel reading. Is the Holy Spirit asking us, "Are we in an intimate union with Christ?" "Are we doing good works under the influence of Grace?" "Are we bearing fruit?" or, "are we dying Spiritually?" Do any of these questions apply to us?

Jesus is warning **us** as he did to his disciples on Holy Thursday night, that they must abide in him, remain closely united with him, as the branch is to the vine, if we are to bear fruit, worthy of heaven. He promises us that **if** we remain closely united to him, that is, to **strive** each day to keep his commandments then he will be ever ready to answer our prayers.

Living a truly Christian life is never easy, nowadays. The attractions of this world have multiplied through the increased comforts, and the means of self-indulgence which science and technology have put within our reach.

The **sincere** prayer of someone, who is trying to lead a Christian life, is to pray for the **grace** to **overcome** the allurements and temptations of this world. However, human nature, is always inclined to choose the easiest way out and now we have so many means of escaping from self-control, that even a fervent Christian, falls for these worldly allurements.

Having the **ordinary** comforts of life, and the possession of **some** of this world's goods, is not wrong, or anti-Christian. But, the natural temptation, is to get more and more of these comforts and riches, until the point is reached when it becomes the **only** purpose in life. When this **sad** stage has arrived, in which God and our future life are forgotten, then this world becomes our **idol**, and our **prison**.

It is indeed difficult to swim against the current, and it is much more pleasant to allow ourselves to be carried without effort, along with the rushing tide. But there are rocks and sandbanks ahead, and the thoughtless, ease-seeking swimmer will end up in grief. However, Jesus has said that he will remain by our side during our life, if only we stay close to him, the vine.

I ask again. Are we in an intimate union with Christ? Or are we in union with the world, and thus dying spiritually?

Will we let the vinedresser prune us, to produce more fruit? Or will we let the world have us lopped off, from the vine. Lopping or pruning ... the decision is ours and ours alone.