

*Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord. Whoever remains in me will bear much fruit.*

Christ is the vine, and we are the branches: by giving us a share in his life, He makes us disciples and our lives produce fruit.

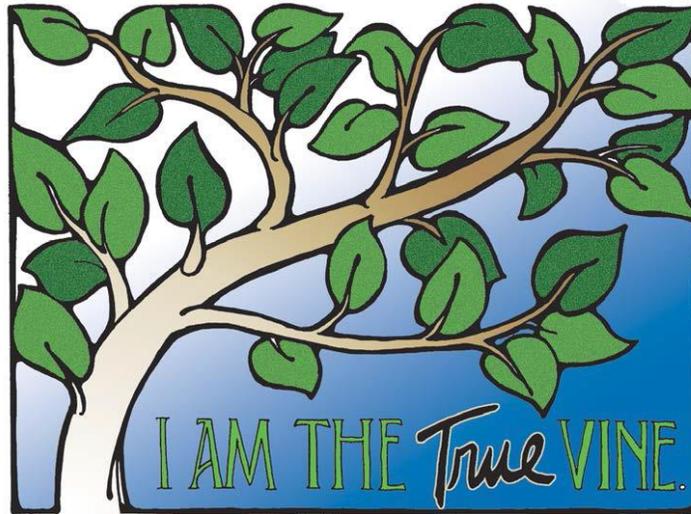
Jesus uses this imagery of vines and bearing fruit to show how we relate to him. There can be no fruit if we do not remain united with him, the true vine, allow ourselves to be pruned by God, to help us bear more fruit.

Jesus is drawing on very ancient imagery in the Bible. In the Old Testament Israel is often described as God's planting; the people are God's special vineyard. Sometimes, when they are disobedient, they produce sour grapes, and create a wine that sets teeth on edge. In the Song of Songs, the love of the Messiah for his people is described as sweet wine: and the place of encounter between the Messiah and his beloved is often a vineyard. Today, Jesus applies this imagery to himself and his disciples.

The key words in today's Gospel is "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." Jesus is teaching that it is only God's initiative of grace that can save us. God is the source of all life and salvation, and, as the second reading says, we are called to respond to that grace, "to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us." So, our belief and our behavior are gradually conformed more and more to Christ, if we remain with him and keep his commandments.

There is also a challenging teaching in the Gospel. Jesus calls us to allow ourselves to be "pruned" by God. This means cutting away all those aspects of our lives that prevent us from flourishing and bearing the fruit of spiritual and corporal works.

So how do we let ourselves be pruned? Well, Jesus has given the sacraments precisely to help us flourish and bear fruit. He "irrigates" us and helps us begin to grow with the Sacrament of Baptism. He

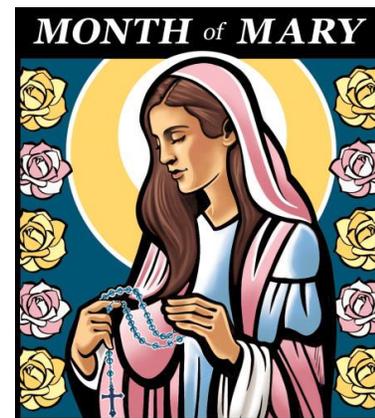


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nourishes us with his own Body and Blood in the Eucharist. He builds up the Church through the Sacrament of Confirmation, Marriage and Holy Orders. We are "pruned" by the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing.

It is particularly in the Sacrament of Penance that we come face to face with those parts of our lives that need pruning so that we

can flourish. Like a good gardener. God does not want the plants to wither and be thrown away for burning but to flourish and to bear fruit. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus states his mission very clearly: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." While some people view Christianity as a series of prohibitions, it is actually a way of life designed to help people thrive. Because of our fallen nature. It can sometimes be difficult to live up to the teaching of Jesus. But Jesus is always there with his love and his grace to help us. As well as being the vine to which we belong, he is also the climate in which we grow and flourish.



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