

Abide in Me and I Will Abide in You

Acts 9: 26-31; Ps. 22; 1 Jn. 3: 18-24; Jn. 15: 1-8

Jesus calls Himself the vine and His disciples the branches. He uses an agricultural metaphor that His listeners can easily understand. They are familiar with grape vines that have branches on which grow bunches of grapes. They know that the branches will not produce grapes if they are not connected to the vine from which they can obtain the nourishment that will allow the fruit to grow.

Through this metaphor, Jesus tells His disciples that they need to be connected to Him to produce 'much fruit'. Not only must they be connected to Jesus but He tells them that they must 'abide' in Him and He in them. Only then can they produce the fruit that God intended for them to do. Only then can they effectively continue Jesus' mission on earth.

Abide means more than simply being Jesus' friend or learning from Him. It has a much deeper meaning. To abide means to dwell in, to stand firm, to remain faithful, to submit. Jesus tells his disciples that if they abide in Him and He abides in them, they will bear much fruit. He tells them that, if they abide in Him, whatever they ask for, they will receive. But He also says that branches that do not produce good fruit will be pruned from the vine by God, the vine dresser, and thrown into the fire as waste material.

How can we abide in Jesus and He in us? The apostle John, in his letter, tells us that this will happen if we believe in Him and love one another as He commanded. And that love is to be expressed not in words but through actions. And we will know that Jesus abides in us because of the Spirit that dwells inside of us.

In the First Reading, we pick up the story of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus at the point where he was trying to join the disciples in Jerusalem. The disciples did not trust him, since he had been such an enemy of the believers previously. But Barnabas convinced them that Saul had indeed been converted and they took him in. Then Saul/Paul began to speak boldly in the name of Jesus, just as zealously as he had persecuted the followers of Jesus before.

What does this mean for us? We too must abide in Jesus and allow Him to abide in us by following His commandment to love God and to love our neighbour. And that love must be shown not just in what we say but in what we do. While this may seem scary to us, Jesus said that, if we follow His commandment, He will send the Holy Spirit to dwell within us to help us. He says that, if we are truly abiding in Him, whatever we ask for will be done.

Sometimes, we may feel that we are not producing much fruit; that we are branches that are withering and weak. This may be caused by our unwillingness or inability to abide in Christ and to allow Christ to abide in us. We are like branches of a plant that are broken, not totally disconnected, but still not able to obtain enough sustenance from the main part of the plant to thrive. It is then that we must renew our faith in Jesus. We must 're-graft' ourselves onto the vine by encountering Him again through the Sacraments. If we do this, we will be able to receive the spiritual nourishment that God wants to give us to help us carry on the mission as instruments of His love.