

Easter V  
4/28/2024

## PRUNING

*Remain in me, as I remain in you.* You could call it staying connected. It's an organic relationship, like that of a vine and its branches, but how do we stay connected? There are many ways but I'd like to look at three ways we stay connected to Jesus, three ways we maintain that relationship.

The first is prayer—daily prayer. People often think of prayer as something complex and esoteric but in reality, prayer is both simple and practical. Prayer is lifting our hearts and minds to God or you could call prayer grounding ourselves in God's love. When we pray, we open our minds and hearts and stay connected to God. There are as many ways to pray as there are people and yet true prayer is simple but it's also practical. We get more done when we pray. It's been said that prayer helps us to make the best of things and not the worst. We're all called to a life of daily prayer. How that is lived out will be different for each person and our prayer is always to be in harmony with our state in life.

The second involves something Jesus talks about, pruning. —This is a beautiful but also graphic image. Pruning involves cutting away what is dead but pruning also involves cutting away part of the plant that's alive for the sake of the whole. —God's word can be like a pruning tool cutting away what needs to go whether its dead or alive and there can be a lot in our own lives that needs to be cut away. It can involve some discipline, some self-sacrifice and even some pain. Sometimes this just happens to us but often God makes us aware, gives us the tool and invites us to do it ourselves.

This involves as we heard on Ash Wednesday, to repent, to turn away from sin and to believe. To turn away, at times even to cut away from our lives what is sometimes sinful and always harmful and to embrace what is good. Are you willing to let God's word prune you?. Are you willing to let God's word cut away what is dead and even alive for your own good? Are you willing sometimes to do it yourself? What in your life needs to be pruned? Painting is an art that involves adding something. So often, sculpture is the *art of removing*. This divine pruning is like sculpture, it creates by removing. We remain close to God by prayer, we remain close to God by remaining close to his word and letting that word make a difference in our lives, even cutting away what needs to go.

But there's a third way we remain connected to Jesus: through the sacraments. Each of the sacraments is a privileged point of connection. This involves both the sacraments we have receive and continue to live as well as the sacraments we receive with greater frequency. In baptism, we are grafted onto the vine that is Jesus, that is where the point of connection is made and the rest of our lives is about maintaining and deepening that connection.

In Confirmation, the Holy Spirit strengthens us in that connection. In the Eucharist, that connection reaches a highpoint as Jesus comes to dwell not near us, not next to us but within our hearts. After each worthy Communion we can say with St. Paul, *It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.*

Now we all know from our own experience that we can get disconnected. Getting disconnected can be a polite way of saying sin but the good news is that God offers us a point of re-connection in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and not only that but God continues to offer us this re-connection not once or twice but without limit. This re-connection expresses God's mercy and God's mercy is so great that it can be hard to get our minds around it but that point of re-connection is there and God's mercy always calls us to conversion, to greater intimacy with him, to deeper connection.

Anointing of the Sick prays for healing and encourages the ill unite themselves, to connect themselves to the suffering Christ. Matrimony is all about connection, about a man and woman becoming connected, becoming one in the Lord and letting love bear fruit. Like marriage, Holy Orders is also about making and deepening a connection with Christ and letting love bear fruit in a different way.

You could sum all this up as living lives of intentional faith in big ways and in every little way. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, he calls us not to something static but to a living, organic relationship with him. This relationship sometimes involves the pain of pruning away but doing so at the service of life. Let us ask for the grace to be a people of prayer, for the courage to be pruned and for a deep appreciation for all the sacraments. We remain connected so that we may bear much fruit and so that in the midst of all that, God may be glorified.