

28. April 2024

Bearing abundant fruit

Jn 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch - and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

The Lord wants us to bear fruit and therefore points out to us that we should remain in Him, for only then will abundant fruit come forth. Bringing forth fruit means that the Lord wants to accomplish through us all the good works that He has planned for people.

The crucial thing in today's text is that the Lord calls us not so much to outward activity, but to a deeper relationship with Him. Fruitfulness springs from intimate communion with Him. The mystics also teach us this and it is easy to understand: After all, we are to do God's works. The more the Lord works in us, the more His Spirit is present, the more our works are of a divine nature and the more fruitful they are.

In this context, stands also the word of pruning. We need this pruning or purification, because it is not only sins that burden us and do not allow us to be permeable to the Holy Spirit, it is also all the things to which we voluntarily grant too important a place in our lives, to which we hang our hearts in an unordered way and which therefore exert too great influence on us and diminish our love for God.

Fr. Louis Lallement, a well-known Jesuit spiritual teacher from the XVI century, aptly writes: "Concern oneself with a thousand superfluous things is one of the greatest

hindrances to the progress that could have been made, it keeps the soul imprisoned in its lowliness and is least noticed”.

Abiding in the Lord, then, is our task; inner purification seeks to do just that and help us to bind our hearts more deeply to God. This can only happen if the Word of the Lord increasingly works in us, if we internalise it and obey it. Through the Word, God can address us directly at any time, the Holy Spirit can remind us of everything Jesus said and did (cf. Jn 14:26). In the light of the Word of God, other things often lose their fascination.

Sometimes we just forget to think of God and check if what we are doing now is meaningful in the Lord or if it distracts us.

Perhaps we have also become accustomed to the distractions and don't even really notice them and are then surprised that we are very distracted in prayer and cannot concentrate properly on what is important.

Abiding in Jesus always means returning to Him from distraction and spending time with Him. Giving ourselves over to voluntary distractions and especially tolerating voluntary imperfections separates us from the Lord. By this is meant that we feel that the Lord wants our attention, but we give in to our natural inclinations without questioning them or seeking to overcome them; they leave evils in the soul!

Fr. Lallement mentions four consequences:

- 1.) They darken and blind more and more.
- 2.) They stain the soul.
- 3.) They disquiet and disturb the soul.
- 4.) They diminish the powers of the soul and weaken it, whereas the exercise of virtue has the opposite effects.

We see here in Fr. Lallement the positive school of discerning the spirits in one's own soul. For example, St. Ignatius of Loyola perceived the difference in the effects on his soul between novels of chivalry and stories of saints. The latter encouraged him to strive for virtue, which was not the case with the former.

I am not speaking here of legitimate recreations, which may have their justification in a conscious and limited way, but of voluntary disordered inclinations, which separate us from the Lord in the long run and do not allow us to abide in Him. It is these that weaken the power of the Word in us and diminish the grace that the reception of Holy Communion wants to give us.

Whoever wants to bring forth abundant fruit in his life and not be satisfied from the outset with the smallest amount, must also resolutely go his way of following Christ and allow himself to be purified by God and cooperate in this himself.

God is the one acting, but we are the cooperators. And let us remember: Jesus wants us to bear much fruit and for the fruit to remain. Let us do our part!