

Dear Parishioners,

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

For many elementary-grade students, long division is their mathematical downfall. As long as the division is simple, it is generally manageable. But when it gets to larger numbers, it gets difficult. And no small part of this difficulty is the “remainder” ... what in the world do we do with what is left over? So, for example, thirty-two divided by eight is four ... that’s simple. But what do we do with something like 2021 divided by 5? What do we do with the remainder, what’s left over? This is a stumbling block for many youngsters. This weekend’s Gospel talks about remaining in Jesus. In a sense, we are “remainders.” We are left over to do His work of bearing fruit. And just like long division, the willingness to remain with Jesus, be pruned, and bear fruit can be a stumbling block for us, too.

We must “remain” in Jesus because this is the only way to be in relationship with the Father. Our attachment to Jesus ... our relationship with the divine ... is a choice of heart that is affirmed and confirmed not only “*in word or speech, but in deed and truth*” (Second Reading). Further, to “remain” in Jesus, we must be willing to be pruned. Even so, pruning is both the problem and the solution. Pruning is a problem because it is painful and we humans avoid what causes us pain. Yet, however painful this pruning may be, it is being done by a God whom we call Father. We bear fruit as disciples because, like with Jesus, the Father (the “Vine Grower”) lovingly tends to us. All the Father’s work in Jesus continues as we remain in Jesus. Only by this personal attachment to the Son can we be in personal relationship with the Father and receive all we need to bear fruit.

Just as God planted and tended the true vine, Jesus, so does God tend us who remain in Jesus so that we, too, might “*bear much fruit.*” God prunes from us whatever does not give life, and nourishes within us whatever does. Our remaining in Jesus and bearing fruit as disciples and our believing in the Son and keeping the commandments (see Second Reading) are all the work of the Father who lovingly tends the life we share with Jesus (“*I am the Vine, you are the branches*”).

In the First Reading, the disciples were afraid to relate to Saul because of his past reputation for persecuting Christians. Barnabas, a member of the community, took Paul under his wings and witnessed to the community on his behalf. In this way, Paul was accepted so that he could preach the Word. Barnabas witnessed to how Paul was “pruned” by his encounter with the risen Jesus, an encounter so intense that he was “pruned” from his old, zealous hatred of this new Jewish sect and became a disciple himself ... one who “remained” in Jesus.

Part of our living the Paschal Mystery ... its dying and rising ... requires that we be willing to be pruned. We must allow God to tend us, so that we might rid ourselves of whatever gets in the way of our being a faithful disciple who not only proclaims the Gospel, but also lives it in “deed and truth.” First of all, this means we must witness to an intimate relationship with God. We do this through prayer and worship ... both private and public acts of glorifying God. Second, we also witness in “deed and truth” through how we relate to others. Taking someone troubled under our wing to help them is but one example of how we remain in Jesus through our caring of others. There are many, many other ways to do this.

May Saint Michael the Archangel protect, guide, and intercede for us always.

~ Fr. Larry