

We are but a few weeks away from the Solemnity of Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early Church, and among us the Church here now. Not surprisingly then there is a beautiful thread woven throughout each of our readings and the Gospel passage we hear today binding these passages, and I think orienting us and preparing us for Pentecost.

Perhaps you heard the connections:

From the first reading from the Acts of Apostles, *“It [the Church] was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.”*

From The 2nd reading from St John’s first letter, *“...and the way that we know that [Jesus] remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.”*

And from the Gospel, *“I am the vine, you are the branches...Remain in me, as I remain in you...Whoever remains in me and I in them will bear much fruit...”*

In these passages we hear of the consolation, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, building up the Body of Christ. We hear of the assurance that Christ remains in us by virtue of the Holy Spirit he gives us. And we hear that this same Spirit binds us to Christ as branches to the vine....in a way that is vital – life-giving to the branches, not only that we live, but that we bear much fruit. The Latin root of the word vine – *vin, vinea* is found in the Latin words *vinctum* – to bind together and *vinculum*, - a bond. Jesus knows exactly what he is trying to convey here, and it is not a mere “affiliation” with Christ. No – he is saying if we keep his commandments and his Word, we remain in Him – and he in us through His Spirit, we are in a bond with Christ – a vital, life-giving bond.

Now, it is important to note that in the Gospel passage we hear, Jesus speaks equally in negative terms – about us not remaining in Him and the consequences; not bearing fruit and withering apart from Him. Becoming no more than lifeless branches, cut off from the vine, to be burned in a fire. These are all consequences of a bond with Christ that has been crimped off or severed as a result of sin and neglect. But thanks be to God that we have the means through Christ to restore the vital bond to Christ, to restore the life-giving vital flow of sap from the vine to the branches,

removing the restrictions or even grafting us anew to the vine! These means are the means of fostering the spiritual life; personal and communal prayer, reading scripture, fasting, solitude and contemplation, spiritual direction, engaging in corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and participating in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Through all of these means the Spirit, the sap of the Vine Jesus Christ flows into us the branches, nourishing us, renewing us, strengthening the bond and causing us to grow that we might bear much fruit. And what is this fruit that we bear? Well, none other than the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which the Church teaches us are; charity, kindness, faithfulness, joy, goodness, modesty, peace, generosity, self-control, patience, gentleness and chastity.

These fruits are “perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory.”<sup>1</sup> You can think of these fruits as the product borne of a life in the Spirit, the product that can seed and nourish the spiritual life in ourselves and those we encounter. Think of any one of those fruits...patience for instance, or joy, or kindness.....when you are on the receiving end of experiencing those fruits from others, how does that make you feel? You’ve just tasted a fruit of the Spirit literally the love of God, and been seeded with that Spirit of Love! These first fruits are but perhaps a taste of what is to come in eternal life in Heaven.

Now, as regards these fruits, I offer you a fruit metaphor. Have you ever tasted a ripe wild strawberry? I recall as a young boy, making my way with my brother through the cow pastures on the farm in June, picking wild strawberries to have in our breakfast cereal. These berries were small, sometimes tiny! But when they were red and ripe they were sweet and bursting with so much strawberry flavor! There is a great lesson there for us: Never underestimate the power of small fruits of the Spirit; little acts of kindness, or generosity, or patience. They can contain great love! And great life!

I am fond of quoting St. Teresa of Calcutta who said once “Don’t look for big things, just do small things with great love.” And she described these “small things” as opportunities for “little practices of love” - opportunities created for us by God, which, because they are creations of God,

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd Ed. (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 1832.

are anything but small...and are in fact, she suggested infinite opportunities to experience God's love!<sup>2</sup>

Never pass up an opportunity for great love in small things, giving in to the notion that "If I'm not doing some recognized form of service; I'm not living out my Christian call to serve." Don't get me wrong, there are wonderful and deep forms of service that in various ways and times we are called to do and should do; just don't let preconceived notions of service blind us to the little opportunities to love and serve on a daily basis that God places before us. And perhaps those little opportunities are more ways of being than they are doing. Are you kind? Are you patient? Are you joyful? Are you peaceful? Are you generous? Are not these ways of being just as much service to the Body of Christ, building up that Body? I think they are; and do not let the temptations of the evil one dissuade you otherwise and keep you from responding to these little opportunities to sow the seeds of God's love in small, subtle ways.

Sisters and brothers, let us push back against this temptation with just opposite, and fill the world with fields of a myriad of little, sweet fruits of the Spirit, little, sweet fruits of God's love! A smile, a kind word, a listening ear, a visit, a reach out; patience with a struggling child, friend or coworker; praying when we don't feel like it; choosing to be positive, when it would be easier to not be; a gentle word or demeanor amidst harsh rhetoric. These are the fruits God wishes us to bear, these and more. And these are the fruits that lead us to the promise that this world cannot give nor fulfill; the promise, the Good News Jesus announces to his Disciples when he said; "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

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<sup>2</sup> Mother Teresa and Brian Kolodiejckuk, M.C., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 34.