

Closing Prayer

O God,
you graft us on to Christ, the true vine,
and, with tireless care,
you nurture our growth in knowledge and reverence.

Tend the vineyard of your Church,
that in Christ each branch may bring forth
to the glory of your name
abundant fruits of faith and love.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers*² · Easter 5B

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Principal Service readings

Acts 8.26-40	Philip baptizes the Ethiopian official
Psalms 22.25-31	All people will revere the Lord
1 John 4.7-21	Abide in love ...
John 15.1-8	The true vine

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The true vine

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.'

John 15.1-8 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Many people reading this passage take the theme of the passage to be about the vine as a metaphor for the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is expressed especially in 15.9: 'as the Father has loved

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me, so I have loved you ...' But the frequent use of the verb 'abide' (*menein*) is central to the literary unity of the passage. So, Jesus develops some teaching on abiding, but he approaches it from different perspectives: the need to abide (15.1-5a), the fruits of abiding (15.5b-8), and abiding in the love of Jesus (15.9-11). This final point leads on to the command to love one another (15.12-17).

Jesus claims: 'I am the true vine' (15.1a). This statement points to what he does by means of his saving revelation. He provides the unique source of life and fruitfulness. Jesus introduces the vinedresser, the Father, who cares for the wellbeing and fruitfulness of the vine. The Father prunes the vine so that it will become more fruitful. The disciples, made clean by the word of Jesus, can be fruitful branches of the vine.

What does it mean to 'abide' in Christ? (1) Connection: abiding in Christ means to have a living connection with him. He abides in us and we abide in him (15.4). It is a very full and intimate connection. If there is no connection there is no mutual life, no fruit. (2) Dependence: Abiding in Christ implies dependence. The branch is dependent on the vine, but the vine is not dependent on the branch. The branch derives its life and power from the vine. Branches are nourished by the vine. Believers are dependent on Christ for everything that counts as spiritual life (15.4). Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (15.5). (3) Continuance: abiding also involves continuance. In fact, 'abide' (Greek, *meno*) means to remain, or stay, or continue. To abide is to reside. To abide is to continue, to stay, to remain.

What is the fruit we are to bear? It is probably both the fruit of the Spirit, which is the fruit of maturity (see Galatians 5.22-23), or a transformed character, and also fruitfulness in evangelism as we bear witness to Jesus and his work.

Quotations

1

Abiding in the Vine then comes to be nothing more or less than the restful surrender of the soul to let Christ have all and work all,"

The true vine / Andrew Murray. 1898

2

We are the members of Christ, and Christ is our member. And my hand, the hand of me who is poorest of the poor, is Christ, and my foot is Christ.

St Symeon the New Theologian, 949–1022

3

Everything leads to union with him, everything brings perfection excepting sin and what is our duty.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, 1675–1751

4

The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus.

James Hudson Taylor, 1832–1905

5

Let us remain with Christ—abiding in Christ—and let us always try to be one with him. Let us follow him; let us imitate him in his movement of love, in his going forth to meet humanity. Let us go forth and open doors. Let us have the audacity to mark out new paths for proclaiming the Gospel.

Pope Francis, 1936–

Related topics

For further study:

Symbol of the cross; paschal mystery; love of God; paschal love; Christology; prayer; baptism; eucharist; mystery of the church; service and servanthood; evangelisation