Sunday Reading

A Reading from the Gospel of John 15:1–8: The Vine and the Branches

Jesus said to his disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Focus Questions

1. What did Jesus say that He and His Father are? What does His Father do?
2. What reason does Jesus give us that we must remain in Him?
3. If we remain in Him, what two things does Jesus promise us?
4. What will happen to those who do not remain in Jesus?
5. Who is glorified when we bear fruit as Jesus’ disciples?
**Remain in Jesus**

**Directions:** In this week's Gospel, Jesus tells that we must remain in Him in order to bear fruit. In fact, without Him, we can do nothing. How is it, then, that we are to remain in Him? What exactly does this mean? As Catholics, we have many different ways to remain in Christ, but perhaps one of the simplest ways to do so is to develop a life of prayer. At its heart, prayer is having a relationship with God. It is talking to Him, listening to Him, and being in His presence. Like any relationship, prayer takes work. And that work is necessary for the good of the relationship.

Read the excerpts below from Fr. Jacques Philippe about prayer. (Fr. Jacques Philippe is a respected Catholic priest and author who has written a number of small devotional books about the spiritual life and prayer.) Then, answer the reflection questions.

**Excerpts from Fr. Jacques Philippe**

1. Remember: the value of mental prayer is not measured by how many things we do. On the contrary: the closer prayer comes to that simple act of love, the more it is worth. Normally, too, prayer becomes more simple the further we progress in the spiritual life.
   - *Time for God*, p.57

2. The life of prayer is the source of infinite riches. It transforms us within, sanctifies us, heals us, helps us to know and love God, makes us fervent and generous in love of neighbor. Provided they persevere, those who commit themselves to a life of prayer can be absolutely sure of receiving all this and more.
   - *Time for God*, pp.15-16

3. The life of prayer is not static. It develops in stages and makes progress—progress that is not always in a straight line but sometimes even seems to fall back.
   - *Time for God*, p.66

4. Experience shows that to pray well and to be brought to the state of passive prayer in which God and the soul communicate in depth, the heart must be pierced—pierced, that is, by the love of God, wounded by thirst for the Beloved.
   - *Time for God*, p.72
5. In starting to pray, alone, facing God, in our room, or in an oratory before the Blessed Sacrament, we must believe with our whole heart that God is present. Regardless of what we may or may not feel, the preparation we have or haven't made, how good we are or aren't at stringing beautiful thoughts together—regardless of our whole inner state—God is there, with us, looking at us and loving us.
- *Time for God*, p.14

6. We sometimes let ourselves be overtaken by excessive noise—not so much physical noise as the ceaseless whirlwind of thoughts, imaginations, and words that we've heard or said—and all this merely feeds our worries, fears, and frustrations, and obviously leaves the Holy Spirit little chance of making Himself heard.
- *In the School of the Holy Spirit*, p.38–39

7. “I'd really like to do mental prayer, but I don't have the time.” How often this has been said! And in a hyperactive world like our own, the difficulty is a real one and should not be underestimated. But time is not always the real problem. The real problem is knowing what really matters in life. As a contemporary author remarked, no one yet has starved to death because they didn't have the time to eat. We always find (or rather take!) the time to do what really matters to us. Before saying we don't have time for mental prayer, let's begin by reviewing our hierarchy of values, to see what our real priorities are.
- *Time for God*, p.26

8. Regarding this problem of time, we should make an act of faith in Jesus' promise: “There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or land, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time!” (Mark 10:29). It is legitimate to apply this to chronological time as well: whoever gives up a quarter of an hour of television in order to pray will receive a hundredfold in this life—the time will be returned to them a hundredfold, not in quantity but in quality. Mental prayer will give one the grace to live out every moment of life in a much more fruitful way.
- *Time for God*, p.27
Reflection Questions

1. What is the central message in the excerpts from Fr. Philippe?
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2. How do the excerpts from Fr. Philippe relate to this week’s Gospel?
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3. According to Fr. Philippe, saying we “don’t have time” to pray is comparable to what?
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4. In the paragraph from In the School of the Holy Spirit what does Fr. Philippe say is a necessary condition for prayer? Why do you think this condition is important?
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5. Which of the quotes from Fr. Philippe stood out to you the most? Why?

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6. What are you doing right now in your daily routine to strengthen your prayer life? How has your relationship with God borne fruit? What is one thing you can do to improve your prayer life?

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