

## Scripture Reading

### **A Reading from Gospel According to John** (*John 15:1-4, 6-8*) *The Vine and the Branches*

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruits unless you remain in Me.”

“If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers, such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ.

### Reflection – United to My True Vine

***A branch unless it bears fruits is useless, and is fit to be thrown away.*** On the personal level, the fruits I am called to bear can be virtues, the building blocks of my personal holiness. To grow in holiness as God has commanded me to do, I need to develop and deepen my virtues. To do so, I need self-knowledge and honesty to acknowledge to myself the areas I am lacking in some virtues. Do I have the courage and honesty to look into my own heart and acknowledge that my heart, my branch may need pruning in order to develop or deepen some virtues? For example, regarding the virtue of holy love, am I ‘handicapped’ by an inordinate self-love in my heart? Do I hold any grudges in my heart? Do I usually insist on doing things my way? Do I give the opinion of others a fair hearing? Am I easily hurt? Do my concerns revolve most of the time around myself, my health, my security, my convenience? Am I easy to get out of my comfort zone? Am I available for help when my friends need it? Am I generous to give credit to others for good work done?

Humility and love is the bedrock of virtues on which other virtues build up and grow. Do I harbour intellectual pride in thinking I am better and smarter than the others? Do I think I am holier than others? Do I trust more in my own human efforts and do not acknowledge God’s Providence in my life? Is spiritual pride preventing me to learn more about God? Do I take God for granted?

***Pruning is testing, and is painful.*** How do I take ‘pruning’? What is my reaction when I face adversities, difficulties, insults, persecution, etc.? Am I humble enough to accept all the adversities God sends me without complaining or worse, losing trust in God? Do I remind myself that ‘pruning’ is part and parcel of the process of my sanctification, my journey towards Heaven? If I lack in certain virtues, God may send me opportunities to develop or deepen those virtues. E.g. If I take too much pride in myself or my work, and some criticism and humiliation come my way, do I see it as a cross the Lord sent me and accept it humbly? If I can do this, I pass the test (the pruning), the virtue of humility is deepened in me, and I am further sanctified. Do I have virtues of faith, hope, love, obedience, patience, perseverance, simplicity and purity?

***Everything we do has to be done out of love and goodwill, otherwise, it has no eternal value.*** There are always different motives for doing different things. However, if good will and love are not the core motivation, no matter how successful the action appears to be, it has only earthly value. St. Paul tells us that even if we hand up our body to be burned but are without love, our action is totally without any good. (cf 1 Cor 13:3). If I am really united to Jesus, my true Vine, my fruits will bear His stamp of love.

***A holy life gives glory to God.*** Holiness is God’s will for me. To be holy is to do God’s will. With a strong desire to live in God’s will, I will place my personal holiness on top priority. I will not let endless activities and busyness affect my prayer and spiritual life. With a steadfast and sincere prayer life, more and more of my thoughts, words and actions will be sprung out of a deep-rooted love in my heart. This deep-rooted love is the sap from the true Vine, Jesus, our Fountain of Life. United to the Vine and nourishing on its sap, I can develop and deepen my virtues, and become a fruitful branch. United to my true Vine, I am on the way to become “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” that God has commanded me to be.

### Conversation with Jesus

Precious Lord, give me courage to look deeply into my own heart and see the areas which I need to work on to deepen my virtues. I wish to work for Your victory in my own heart. Illuminate my conscience. Unfold all the hidden dark corners of my heart and prune away all imperfections. Give me the grace of true repentance when I go for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I pray for the virtues that my heart is lacking in. Open my heart to be able to receive your graces and help me to practise these virtues. Mary, Protectress of the Faith, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus, Praise You, Jesus.