

Gospel Reflections:
JOHN 15

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JOHN 15:1-14 – ON THE WAY TO THE GARDEN – THE VINE & THE BRANCHES

- ¹ I am The True Vine, and My Father is The Husbandman.
² Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
³ Now ye are clean through The Word which I have spoken unto you.
⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.
⁵ I am The Vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.
⁶ If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.
⁷ If ye abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
⁸ Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.
⁹ As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love.
¹⁰ If ye keep My Commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's Commandments, and abide in His love.
¹¹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.
¹² This is My Commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
¹³ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
¹⁴ Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

CHRIST is The Eternal Vine of men's souls and lives. We as His adopted children become the branches within His Body The Church. But if we do not continue to abide in Him, The Father Above as The Everlasting Husbandman of men's souls and lives, then we will be trimmed away from The Source of life and cast away into everlasting separation from Him – hell. What is hell, this place of everlasting fire, into which rotting branches are separated from The Body of CHRIST and burned up in? It is an everlasting place where men are forever cut off from The Love of GOD, but where The Judgement of GOD is ever an inescapable living eternal reality!

The Catechism of The Catholic Church warns, "...To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting GOD's merciful Love means remaining parted from Him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with OD and the blessed is called 'hell.'" ¹ And how tragic and sad such a fate is for a soul of man. For GOD created all of us because of His Divine Love, and His desire that no man perish in his sin, but that all should come to salvation and be His now and forever. But because GOD is holy, as the prophet writes in EZEKIEL 18:4, The Almighty reminds us all, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Spiritual death equals eternal separation from The Loving Creator, 'hell.'

¹ Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1033, p 292. "IV. Hell."

But as GOD loves us, as we have seen, now JESUS commands us to love one another as He loves us. Now this is certainly not always easy, often difficult, at times seemingly almost impossible and in some cases beyond what we may see to do! Think of being in a communist gulag work camp being slowly starved, beaten, abused and worked to death by evil godless men. Think of standing in line just off the boxcar at a nazi death camp, where some would perish immediately in the gas chambers, others worked to death under the lash of total human depravity. Think of walking down a dark city street, a mugger threatens you with death with the gun in his hand, lest you give him all your money. Think of the family member whom you have loved all the days of your life, but because of your love for The LORD, spit upon and reject you.

All these we are called in some way to love, to forgive, to show forth The Divine Love. These are difficult questions. We are also often called, as GOD's soldiers of The blessed Cross, to oppose evil and stand in the gap for the weak in the face of oppression. Think of Corrie Ten Boon, a Dutch woman who, with her family in World War II in nazi-occupied Holland, hid fleeing Jews in their home. They were discovered. She and all her family – herself, her sister and their father – were shipped off to a nazi death camp. But what do we pray in 'The Our Father' as in LUKE 11:4? We pray, O GOD, "...forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

There her sister and father were worked to death under indescribably horrific conditions. Corrie survived and was, by a bureaucratic error, released. Decades later she faced the former death camp military officer who had been personally responsible for her and her family's sufferings and losses. What did she do? She forgave him as CHRIST forgave her. She extended the hand of Christian love to her former enemy. And it may very well be that his soul was saved in CHRIST as a result! And the glory? She gave it to GOD and rejoiced.

JOHN 15:15-27 – IF THE WORLD HATES OUR LORD, IT WILL ALSO HATE US

¹⁵ Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.

¹⁶ Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of The Father in My Name, He may give it you.

¹⁷ These things I command you, that ye love one another.

¹⁸ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.

¹⁹ If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My Saying, they will keep yours also.

²¹ But all these things will they do unto you for My Name's Sake, because they know not Him that sent Me.

²² If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

²³ He that hateth me hateth My Father also.

²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.

²⁵ But this cometh to pass, that The Word might be fulfilled that is written in their Law, They hated Me without a cause.

²⁶ But when The Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

²⁷ And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

If the world hated, and still hates, our Lord JESUS CHRIST, should we expect those who are perishing in sin and darkness to not hate us? What does our Lord declare in The 8th Beatitude? He proclaims in MATTHEW 5:10-12, “Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is The Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My Sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Saint Matthew adds this explanation from the mouth of our Lord after ‘The Our Father,’ in MATTHEW 5:14, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you!” Not easy. We cry out to GOD, if we have faith in Him, when we are afflicted and oppressed by others, especially if that affliction is unjust. But when we are oppressed, abused, even tortured in body, mind or soul, for The Name of our Lord, there we are called to forgive and – in His strength and Grace – rejoice.

And it is so in this world often that the righteous of GOD suffer and die at the hands of evil men. We can hear our cry in the cry of the psalmist as in PSALM 44:21-24, “Shall not GOD search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. Yea, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? arise, cast *us* not off for ever. Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, *and* forgettest our affliction and our oppression?”

Saint Paul echoes These Words, giving us the answer to the question the psalmist cries out for an answer to, “Why, O GOD, do Thy righteous suffer?” Paul replies in ROMANS 8:34-39 that nothing can separate us from The Love of GOD, “Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* CHRIST that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of GOD, Who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS our Lord!”

Only we ourselves can sever ourselves from The Divine Love of our Eternal Master, JESUS CHRIST. Only we may endanger our earthly and eternal lives to such a degree with the stains of sin and hardheartedness, that The Everlasting Husbandman – GOD The Father – may be compelled to saw us off from our Everlasting Vinedresser – GOD The Son. And GOD forbid, that one who has ever named The Name of CHRIST as Lord and Saviour should ever then, because of his own refusal to repent before GOD's throne in sackcloth and ashes upon the head of his soul, ever be cast into the eternal fires of hell! O Divine Comforter – HOLY SPIRIT – keep us in Your Presence and vouchsafe our souls in The Blood of CHRIST, now and forever!