

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 6, 2018

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In the Gospel Our Lord Jesus said, “Abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. He is teaching about the connection existing between the Father and the Son *and* the Son’s disciples. The Lord used an analogy His followers would understand. Jesus gave them the allegory of the vine. (We heard a part of this allegory as last Sunday’s Gospel at Mass.) Jesus said, “I am the vine,” i.e. not the roots or the main stem but *the whole vine*. Therefore, just as a branch is part of the whole vine, so also we are part of Christ, not simply attached, but a *part* of Him.

Many of you have had the pleasure of touring a vineyard and ending up in the wine tasting shop and restaurant. There is a region in lower Ontario which has perfect soil and climate conditions for growing grapes. We often spend the night in the Niagara escarpment area on our trips to Michigan in late summer. But by late summer none of the grape vines look healthy. They are all scraggly, gnarled, and quite stark in appearance. The way these clusters of grapes are trussed up on wooden poles and bound with wire they take on the shape of a man hanging on a cross. And I wonder if that appearance is deliberate. (Next time you see a grapevine in late summer see what you think.)

A grapevine is nearly impossible to kill. Being pruned back and having non-bearing branches cut off, and with a harsh and hot growing season after spring rains, gives the vine not only a deathly look but also produces the very intense concentration of grape juice which can ferment into first-class wine.

In John Chapter Fifteen Our Lord Jesus says, in effect, “I am like that.” I am a vine which appeared dead but springs forth to cover the earth. You disciples are part of that growth. By being part of the vine you have the sustaining power of its life in you. One result of this life is that when we ask for things “in His Name” we are not invoking some magic recipe out of a book we take down from a shelf when needed! The context of our asking is set within the Lord’s teaching about the vine and the branches. We can ask in His Name because we are part of the vine.

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How can a branch ask for anything not according to the good of the whole plant? It is not possible. In the same way, as branches of the vine which is Christ, we ask for things according to His will, according to what Jesus wants to give us.

Of course much of the time we do the very opposite. And then we are surprised or disappointed by the answers, or what appears to us to be non-answers, to our prayers. We approach the Lord in prayer as if we were trying to change His mind or get Him to do something He does not want to do! When I was a boy every child at some point prayed, "Lord, please give me a shiny new *Schwinn* bicycle for Christmas." This may or may not be prayer coming from being part of the vine! We are to ask for what the Lord already desires to give us, and the bestowal of which will bind us more closely to Him and consequently, to all other parts of the vine.

Christ desires to draw you and me ever closer to Him. If our asking in prayer does not further that end, there will still be an answer. But it will be some way which we may not want, but which we *need*. If you do not win the lottery perhaps it is because given great wealth would turn you into an arrogant and obnoxious monster!

The sinful man is like a branch severed from the vine because he asserts things contrary to the vine. Such a person may pray, but he is actually asking for things which separate him from Christ. And it is a sign of the Lord's loving kindness that His answers to prayer never harm the relationship to Him. Real prayer is asking from within the life of Christ, Whose love holds all things together. That is why it has been said "The petitions of a true disciple are echoes of Christ's words."