

## “I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES” (JOHN 15:5)

In today's Gospel reading (John 15:1-8), Jesus used an analogy of a vine and its branches to point out how important or indispensable He is to us. Think about a tree and its branches. A tree can exist for a long time without its branches, but the branches cannot exist for a long time without the tree. A tree gives life to its branches for them to bear fruit. A tree consists of both the stem and its branches. Jesus used this analogy to tell us that we are part of Him and we need to be grounded in Him if we want to easily bear good fruit. EACH OF US IS A PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. We all are united in Christ irrespective of our gender, race, status, orientation or background and age. We received the same baptism, the same Holy Spirit, the same Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and will go to the same Heaven after our death. As parts of Christ's Body, we draw strength, energy, support, encouragement, and so forth from Christ. Jesus encourages and strengthens us as we read and meditate on the Gospel messages. There are forces in this world. We need a stronger force to be able to withstand the negative or evil forces in our world today. These negative forces influence us to do what we are not proud of, what we do not like to do or to go against God's will. These forces are beyond scientific explanation and most times, those who have the gift of discernment feel their presence through their activities. We cannot overcome every evil force or evil on our own. WE NEED A STRONGER FORCE TO OVERCOME ALL THE EVILS OR EVIL FORCES IN OUR SOCIETIES. The stronger force which we need is Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew 8, when Jesus encountered these evil forces, they asked Him if He came to torment them before the time (Matthew 8:29). These evil forces believe that Jesus is stronger than them. Jesus Christ, in the Gospel reading today, points out that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Can a small car pull out a truck from the ditch? To pull out a truck from the ditch, one must use another vehicle stronger than the truck. All of us in this world are like the truck in the ditch that needs to be pulled out. We need to be pulled out from what is preventing us from having a cordial relationship with God. We need Jesus to direct us, enlighten us, encourage us, strengthen us, heal us, forgive our sins, and protect us. Jesus is ever ready to help us if we remain in Him. A tree cannot give life to its branches that are cut off from the tree. For a truck to be pulled out from the ditch, the truck must be connected to a stronger vehicle. The image, in today's Gospel reading, “illustrates that we always need to be connected to something stronger than ourselves-something that is always the source of nourishment” (Fr. Jerry). How can we remain in Jesus Christ? Jesus requested that we remain in Him just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine. WE REMAIN IN JESUS CHRIST BY HAVING FAITH IN HIM. Our faith must be expressed through our actions. That is why St. James points out that faith without good work is dead (James 4:6). It is encouraging that many people are now expressing their faith through their actions or deeds. Many people have started receiving forgiveness of their sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus is now being adored or revered in the Eucharist by many and many people have started loving Jesus by loving others. We remain in Jesus by trusting Him and believing that He loves us even when our challenges remain or increase despite our prayers and sacrifices. God is in charge of our lives and whatever He allows to happen is for a good reason. JESUS DID NOT PROMISE US PROBLEM FREE LIFE OR A LIFE THAT IS FREE OF CHALLENGES IN THIS WORLD. JESUS PROMISED US SALVATION IF WE REMAIN IN HIM. When we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ we remain

in Him. NO ONE WILL LOSE ANYTHING BY REMAINING IN JESUS CHRIST. May God, through His Spirit, help us remain in Jesus Christ throughout our lives on earth, Amen.