

- Now that we are more than halfway through the Easter Season, our readings speak briefly of the Holy Spirit, reminding us to prepare our hearts and minds for His coming at Pentecost in just three more weeks.
- In our first reading from the Book of Acts we have that very last line that speaks of how the early Church: “walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.”
- In our second reading, the very last line is, “the way we know that [Christ] remains in us is from the Spirit He gave us.”
- These concluding lines are key because they remind us of the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and growth of the Church. You see, it is through the Holy Spirit that Christ makes His Church “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” (CCC 811).
- By dwelling in all those who believe as well as by pervading and ruling over the entire Church, the Holy Spirit is able to bring about the communion of all the faithful and join us intimately together in Christ, who is principle of the Church’s unity (cf. CCC 813).
- Our Lord speaks to us today about the unity He desires with us. He says, “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.”
- And our Lord goes on to promise us, “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit.... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.”
- Conversely, our Lord also warns us: “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.”
- So we’re given a rather stark choice today to either remain as one of the branches on the vine of Christ so that we might bear much fruit, or to refuse this union with Christ, and to be separated from Him like a dead branch that is good for nothing but burning.
- In our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today from the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of St. John, the beloved disciple tells us that the way we remain in Christ and He in us is by keeping Christ’s commandments.
- St. John tells us that by keeping our Lord’s commandments, we please Him and we will receive from God whatever we ask of Him.
- So the upshot is that if we wish to be fully united with Christ and have Him dwell within us, if we wish to be a living branch in His Church rather than a dead branch that will be thrown out and burned, then our first step is simply to obey God’s commandments.
- Of course God’s commandments are communicated to us through Holy Scripture and through the constant teaching Tradition of the Church.
- But let us recall that, while our Lord and His Church have many commandments and laws – all of which we should happily follow – the greatest commandment that our Lord gives us is to love: to love Him above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- You see, living a true life in Christ is not just about the careful observance of rules and rituals. Living a true Christian life is ordered toward love.
- And we learn the nature of love and what it demands of us through the example of Jesus Himself, Who willingly laid down His life for us, despite our sins.

- So, my brothers and sisters, if we are to be worthy of the name of *Christian*, if we are to be true branches on the vine of Christ, then we must follow His example and be willing to do the same.
- As St. John teaches us today, we cannot love in only “word or speech, but in deed and truth”! St. John’s point is that love is not just a warm feeling or emotion. True love, true charity must take action! True love is sacrificial in nature; it demands something of us.
- It is one thing to say that we love someone. It a whole other thing to show that love by doing something charitable, by giving of yourself for the sake of another.
- Of course love is not the only commandment of the Church, and following all of the commandments of God and of His Church is not always easy, is it? Our Christian faith is rigorous.
- How many of us have despaired or become angry at the thought of having to give up a sinful action or lifestyle because we knew it conflicted with the Church’s teachings?
- And how many of us have left the Church – if even for just a period of time – because we thought her teachings to be unreasonable, untenable, or impossible to follow?
- Being a faithful member of Christ’s one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is very rigorous indeed, and it requires self-mastery and humility.
- Just as Christ died on the cross, we must be willing constantly to die to our selfish desires and habits if we want to practice our faith with integrity.
- The good news is that when we make the effort to stay grafted to the vine of Christ, when we try to be obedient to Christ and His commandments, then He gives us grace.
- If we are faithful to prayer and to the Sacraments, receiving Holy Communion worthily and humbly confessing our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, then Jesus gives us every grace we need to be faithful and true to Him.
- When we commit ourselves to living in a state of grace by trying to avoid all mortal sins and confessing those sins that we do commit, then His Holy Spirit dwells within us and makes true union with Christ possible.
- As we come habituated to living a life in Christ, then we cannot help but want to thank our Lord by performing works of charity. When we remain in Christ and Christ remains in us, we very naturally begin to bear that fruit that is the proof of our union with Him!
- And this good fruit we bear not only helps us grow in holiness, but it also attracts others to Jesus so that they, too, might enter into true union with Him and become grafted onto His vine.
- My brothers and sisters, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are each called to union with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He is the vine, and we are the branches. Apart from Him we can do nothing.
- Let us all make the firm commitment today to set aside anything in our lives that is displeasing to God and that separates us from Him.
- Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we unite ourselves with Him in obedience to His commandments, in constant prayer, and in the worthy reception of the Sacraments, so that we truly may become good fruit on the vine of Christ.