

V SUNDAY OF EASTER- 29th APRIL 2018

WHOEVER ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE IT IS THAT BEARS MUCH FRUIT - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 15,1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

There are some passages in the Gospel which, if understood, radically and profoundly change, the relationship with God and the relationship with others. One of these is in John's gospel, chapter 15. Where Jesus presents himself as the true vine. Let's read.

Jesus states "*I am*" and already claims the fullness of the divine condition with the name of God, "*I am the true vine,*" and Jesus continues in the series of substitutions of the great values of the tradition of the Old Testament with his own person. Jesus had announced that he is the true bread that came down from heaven and not the manna, He said that he is the true light and not the law that illuminates the people and now states that he is the true vine. The vine is the image with which the prophets indicated the people of God. It is enough to think of the love song of his vines in book of the prophet Isaiah chapter 5 or of Jeremiah when the Lord himself said "*Yet I planted you a choice vine,*" (Jeremiah 2,21)

Well now Jesus gives very precise and very clear instructions. "*...my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.*" What is the meaning of a branch that, while being in him, does not bear fruit? How can it not bear fruit? Here the evangelist, the allusion is to the community that gathers around the Eucharist. In the Eucharist Jesus becomes bread, food of life for those that welcome him, and this is the vital lymph of life, those that welcome him will be able to make bread, food of life for others. Whoever eats bread, but does not make bread for others, says Jesus, my Father, who knows all this, cuts and eliminates him.

“..and every branch that does bear fruit,” that is that makes bread and makes food for others *“..he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* The work of the Father as the vinedresser is all tended to always improve the production of the vine that it will always give larger bunches of grapes. Then it is the scrupulous attention of the Father who, when he identifies negative elements in these branches, it is he who eliminates them and he alone. Why is this?

Naturally each one of us has limits, defects and imperfections. If one concentrates all on oneself in removing these imperfections and limits, attention, does nothing but makes oneself the centre of everything and there is nothing more dangerous, because one seeks an image of spiritual perfection so far and so abstract as great as one's ambition.

No, Jesus says: think to make bread, food of life for others, think to live for the good and welfare of others and, if there are negative elements, it will be the Father that, continually and in a systematic way, will eliminate them; not you, neither the others. In the first letter of John, this concept is taken up again, where the evangelist says, *“...whenever our heart (heart meaning mind) condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”* (1John 3,20) So live serenely, direct your life for the good of others and your imperfections, faults and limits, if they are impediment to bringing more love, the Father will think of eliminating them: here is the full serenity.

Then Jesus states *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”* The word that Jesus states is the love that becomes service and which is concretized in the washing of the feet. And he continues with the invitation to stay with him, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”* . There is the dynamic, which is the dynamics of the Eucharist, of community life, of a received love which is transformed into a communicated love. This is what nourishes and strengthens this communication of life: service to others is the guarantee of communion with Jesus.

Jesus again confirms *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, ...”* The more you give and receive love and ability to love, *“..for apart from me you can do nothing.”* Here the verb ‘to do’ is the verb of creation, so if there is not this communion of love in becoming bread we can no longer be associated with the creative action of the Father.

The image of the branch is now explained by the evangelist with this phrase: *“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”* The reference is to the prophet Ezekiel, who in chapter 15 of his book speaks of the uselessness of the wood of the vine. The wood of the vine serves only to transmit the vital lymph to the fruit.

“And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything?Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the

fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything?" (Ezekiel 15, 1-4)

This is why Jesus talks of the vine among the many images, because it is the only wood that is useless. From other trees objects can be obtained. The wood of the vine, no, it serves only to transmit the vital lymph.

"..and withers;" again here the image refers to the prophet Ezekiel 37, where the people of Israel are portrayed to a valley of dried bones, then lifeless.

Jesus concludes with two conditions: the first *"If you abide in me,"* to stay with him.

Therefore in full communion with him, feeding and feeding others. The second

"..and my words abide in you," so not only Jesus himself but also his words must be totally absorbed to modify man's behaviour.

And here is the guarantee, *"...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*

But with a condition to be in full communion with the Lord and that his words have been absorbed by the person.

"By this my Father is glorified," glory is the visualisation of the name, here in this case of God. The glory of God does not consist in spectacular or grandiose manifestations, fruit of man's ambition, but the glory of my Father is that you bear much fruit. Making of one's life a food of life for others, a food of love for others, this is what gives glory to God.

"...so prove to be my disciples." Attention: it is bearing fruit that makes disciples, not making disciples to bear fruit; this is a guarantee of being the disciples of Jesus.