

John 15:1-8^{v vi}

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just 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. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

^v About the Gospel: John 15:1-8

Jesus, as Son, the representative of Israel, is “the true vine” (v. 1) who fulfills the calling of Israel. The Father is the vine grower who “prunes” (v. 2, “trims clean”) the branches. Jesus reassures the disciples that they are already “pruned” (v. 3, translated “cleansed” in the NRSV) by his word.

For John, Christian life is an active and committed life. There cannot be a living, unproductive branch. Those who do not remain, or abide, are taken away. Those who do abide through prayer bear fruit and show themselves as Jesus’ disciples.

^{vi} Reflection and Response

Wise educators identify three essential components of teaching: the content, the process and the person. The story recounted in Acts today shows a marvelous interplay of these elements. The content is a reading from Isaiah that the Ethiopian can understand only marginally. Those who have always read that passage in the context of Jesus’ passion can appreciate how confusing it must seem to one who views it without that lens. When Philip gives him that understanding, the eunuch wants to plunge into baptism immediately.

Thus, the process rolls along with the wheels of the chariot. When the man asks for baptism, Philip does not respond with a list of dogmas or a daunting program of instruction. Instead, he hops into the water with him. That boyish splash says volumes about catechesis at its best. Do our parish programs welcome inquirers with such enthusiasm, such heart-stopping speed?

Finally, the author of Acts tells us about the person in a nutshell. We know his background, occupation and questions faster than most people can fill out an information form.

The chances of Philip and the Ethiopian meeting each other and holding their discussion seem highly unlikely, but God creates their moments together. We may feel exiled. We may wander far from church or organized religion. But God, the relentless Lover, seeks us, intersects our paths and sends us on rejoicing.

Jesus reveals himself to us as unexpectedly as he did to the Ethiopian. What must have first seemed like a rude interruption of study becomes a dramatic turning point in the man's life. Do we honor God's revelation in the texts of our lives as much as we revere the sacred scripture?