

The Vine and the Branches

Jesus loves to talk in parables. He finds us a bit slow to grasp things and tries to find comparisons for us to understand better and deeper the things of God. It is not easy for him to talk about the other life. A vineyard was very precious in the ancient world. People risked their lives to possess them. For us it is just a business. But for them it was their livelihood. It produced wine, grapes and raisins, fruit and drink for the whole year, when many times water was scarce and polluted. A vineyard was an asset for life.

The Old Testament already used this image. Psalm 80 speaks of the uprooting of the vine in Egypt and its establishment in another land: “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove away the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground; it took root and filled the land.” In the book of Isaiah God complains that despite the care he has lavished on it, his vineyard has yielded only wild grapes. Jesus uses this image of the vineyard in his parable of the murderous tenants to explain how the Jews rejected Jesus. Here the comparison is different, more personal. Jesus is the true vine, because the old vine, the chosen people, has been succeeded by the new vine, the Church.

This parable has to do with producing fruit, the fruit God wants us to produce. Two simple questions we need to ask ourselves: Am I producing anything worthwhile? Am I producing the fruit God wants me to yield? We need to be sincere. It is easy to fool ourselves. Of course, we are doing something, working, earning some money, but maybe it is not what God wants from us. It could be just wild grapes. We all feel we are not producing enough, a small percentage of what we should. We need to examine ourselves to see how can we increase our output.

This parable tells us the secret of how to be fruitful. It is very simple: to be united to the vine, united to Jesus; the more we are in union, the more fruit. It all has to do with words synonymous of union: immersion, intimacy, identification, indwelling. Interesting, all these words begin with the word “in”, which gives the impression of us being introduced into Jesus Christ, centering ourselves around him. Saint Paul talks about becoming Jesus Christ, the same Christ, Ipse Christus. How can this happen? It has to do with letting Christ live in us, letting Jesus be our boss. Do we allow Jesus to come into our lives? It is a bit like letting Jesus into our own car. But we can just place him at the back, or in the passenger seat, or maybe in the boot. We should let him be in control, managing our steering wheel.

Every winter the vines are pruned. You need to know how to do it. The next crop depends on a good pruning. The vines that are pruned look naked, devoid of any branches. It is a completely different sight, the vines in winter, bare and brown, and in full bloom during summer, lush and green. We too need to be pruned, to go through the cross, to experience obstacles and difficulties, to produce more. If we don't allow Jesus to prune us, or if we rebel against his will, we are not going to produce what God wants from us.