

**IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, FATHER, SON,
and HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.**

Sermon on Abiding in the Lord

Lessons: Psalm 19:7-14

John 15:1-17

True Christian Religion 360, 361

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“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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are cleansed *and pruned* already by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

(John 15:1,2,4,5)

“Abide in Me, and I in you.” These words spoken by our Lord mean that a person, as to his spirit, that is, as to his love, his faith, and his life dwells in the Lord and the Lord dwells in that person. Such a person brings forth much fruit. By fruit in these verses is meant the works of charity, or what is the same, good works. Charity and faith are from the Lord and are the Lord’s in and with a person. When a person abides in the Lord, then he is in charity and faith. A person does not bring forth fruits, that is, good works, simply by doing what he thinks to be good works. Good works are done by those who are being regenerated, that is, those who are being reborn as to their spiritual life. Such a person is able to do good because he has worked to acquire for himself the Charity and Faith which together make good works. Doing good works from Charity and Faith is the path to spiritual growth and development.

The first first step in this path toward spiritual growth is that a person must learn the truths of faith or of doctrine. This is so because truths teach a person what he ought to believe and what he must do in order to receive spiritual life. In the beginning, there is usually an affection for the truths of the Word. A person in this state receives with great delight truths of the literal sense of the Lord's Word. Indeed, the delight and affection for these external truths is so strong that a person

may think that the truths he understands are internal. This is especially true with regard to the Third Testament.

In our reception of these first truths there is often some type of temptation. How many times when we are reading the Word do we have thoughts like: "This doesn't make sense.", "This can't be true.", or "This doesn't agree with my ideas." These may be temptations as to truth, which may be severe or light depending upon how committed we are to our previous or preconceived ideas. When we see, understand, and then accept a truth, there is then a sort of cleaning or pruning of our minds. Our minds by some truths accepted, are prepared and opened for the reception of more truths. This is meant by the Lord saying, "You are cleansed *and pruned* already by the word which I have spoken to you." The word which he has spoken to us means the truth in his Word, and the cleansing and pruning is the effect of such truth upon our minds.

The second state in our spiritual growth or development is when we come to live according to the truths of faith. When we are in this state we see that truths are meant to be lived and not just collected like a bunch of delightful facts. We see that we must obey what the Word teaches. If the truths remain only in the understanding, they become merely mental abstractions or thoughts, without real life. Truths live when we live according to them, and for a person to live according to truths, he must shun evils as sins against the Lord. A person in the beginning of this second state may have an affection for the truth, yet not have a love of living according to that truth. This happens because living according to the truth is opposed by our natural self-centered worldly loves and desires.

In every person's soul the Lord abides, otherwise, no one could live. But, while the Lord abides in every person, not everyone abides in the Lord. A person abides in the Lord when he acts to receive the Lord into his conscious life. When a person acts to acquire faith and charity, he prepares himself naturally to receive what is spiritual. We seek to abide in the Lord when we live according to the Word of the Lord.

Abiding in the Lord is described this way in True Christian Religion 359:

"He who abides in me and I in him, the same bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) This is to be understood in this way, that a person of himself is unable to acquire for himself any but natural faith, which is a persuasion that a thing is so because someone of authority has said so; or any but natural charity,

which is an endeavor to gain favor with a view to some recompense. In such faith and charity there is what is the person's own, but not as yet life from the Lord. Nevertheless by means of such faith and charity a person prepares himself to be a receptacle of the Lord; and so far as he prepares himself, the Lord enters, and causes his natural faith to become spiritual, likewise his charity, and thus makes both to be alive; and this is done when a person goes to the Lord as the God of Heaven and earth. Because man was created an image of God, he was created an abode of God.... From all this comes the conclusion, that as a person prepares himself naturally to receive the Lord, so the Lord enters and makes all that is within a person inwardly spiritual, and thus alive." (TCR 359)

Charity and faith must be together in good works. Charity consists in willing what is good, faith in thinking what is right, and good works consists in doing what is good from willing what is good. As said earlier, unless charity and faith are expressed in works, they are merely mental abstractions, just thoughts. Those who regard good works or uses as of no account, and who make them of no account by not doing them, close Heaven to themselves, for they neither love God nor do they love the neighbor.

In the Word it is said that good works are like mirrors, for the works of a person reflect the whole character of that person. They reflect what is in the person in respect to his charity and faith because they come from his charity and faith. For this reason it is said in Matthew that, "by their fruits ye shall know them." The fruits or works of a person reveal all that is within them. The works are a reflection of a person's true loves.

In this world, people can appear different from what they are internally. It is difficult to judge a person from his works. For the person who is self-centered, seeking only to have others admire and follow him, can produce works that outwardly appear as good as or better than the person who produces works out of spiritual charity. In this world we cannot judge with certainty the state of another from his works. And yet we are taught that "you shall know them by their fruits." Likewise, we are taught in Matthew that "every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit." (Matthew 7:17) In judging according to works, it is not enough to judge just the work itself, but the end or goal that such a work leads to.

In general the works of a person who loves himself above all will continually tend to promote himself and his own ends. But the works of the person who loves

the neighbor and the Lord, will look toward promoting what is good for the neighbor. Good works that are truly done out of charity look to what is the Lord's in another and seek to promote that. In good works which have their origin from charity and faith, there is an underlying humility, because one who is in charity and faith acknowledges that the Lord is in everything in him, and that all that he produces is not from himself, but from the Lord working in him and through him. This humility is in all genuine good works because it is a reflection of the humility that is in such a person.

From the good works, which we do, we can see something of our own spiritual state, for we can reflect upon just what we have in mind in doing the works, whether it is for serving our own purposes or whether it is truly for being useful to others. The good works we may do serve as a mirror reflecting ourselves. And seeing that reflection we can consider our own purposes and ask ourselves, "Is it from the desire to serve ourselves and our own ends and to be thought of as wiser than others, or is it from the desire to serve the Lord and the Church in others? In regard to good works as applied to ourselves, we may reflect that by our fruits we may know ourselves.

This reflection upon ourselves as to our own spiritual state is a means by which the Lord prepares us for further spiritual growth. In our text from John we read: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." Interesting. When we are in the Lord, he prunes us. Pruning involves cutting things away. Often when we prune a tree, it looks pretty bare when we are done. So many branches can be removed, that we may wonder if the tree will ever really be as fruitful as it was in the past. But we know that pruning when done right, actually makes a tree more fruitful. So also with the Lord's pruning. He is a master gardener and knows just the branches and twigs that we need to have removed. When he begins pruning us it may not feel good or look very good. Yet we know down the road apiece, perhaps during the next season of growth, we will be more fruitful than we ever were. When we think about it, we may want to say, "Yea, Lord, bring on the pruning shears!" And I when the time comes that we see ourselves being more spiritually fruitful, we may want to say, "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

Amen.

**AND NOW, TO THE ONE ONLY GOD, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, BE
GLORY AND DOMINION FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN**