

Christ Is the Vine, We the Branches

In the middle of last month, Pope John Paul II went to the Church of St. Stanislaus in Rome to inaugurate celebrations of the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of the patron saint of Poland. There he delivered the following homily in Polish.

"Abide."

The word that returns most often in the readings of the Fifth Sunday after Easter is precisely the word abide. With this word the Risen Christ, who had first been crucified, invites us to union with him.



He presents this union to us, referring to a simile drawn from nature. The branches abide in the vine and for this reason they bear fruit. They cannot do so by themselves if this organic link with life is lacking. In this case, in fact, there remain only twigs and dry branches, which are gathered and thrown into the fire, because they can be used as firewood. On the other hand, as long as the branches remain in the vine and draw vital sap from it, they continue to be real branches. They form one thing with the vine, and are even defined together with it with the same name, "the vine." They also deserve careful attention on the part of the owner, the vine-dresser. He looks carefully at every vine and every branch. If it bears fruit, "he prunes it," so that it may bear even more fruit. But if it does not bear fruit, he removes it so that it will not get in the way, and with its fruitless growth weigh down the vine.

Here is the simile.

Here is the image in which there is expressed everything that had to be said in order that listeners would understand — first: The mystery of spiritual abiding in Christ; and the duty of producing spiritual fruits owing to the fact that they abide in him. For this reason the Master uses at the same time descriptive language, showing the branch that remains in the vine, and normative language, giving an order. He says "abide in me."

In what does this "abiding" in Jesus Christ consist?

St. John himself, who included the allegory of the vine in his Gospel, offers an answer to this question as author of the first letter. "All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them." This is most evident proof. The apostle almost seems to hesitate in answering the question whether it is possible to establish and ascertain, with the help of some criterion that is verifiable, such a mysterious reality as the

abiding of God in man, and thanks to that of man in God. This reality is strictly spiritual in nature. Is it possible to ascertain, to check this reality? Can man have the certainty that his works are good, pleasing to God and that they serve His abiding in his soul? Can man be certain that he is in a state of grace?

The Apostle answers this question as if he were answering himself and us at the same time: "If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God," the confidence that we abide in him, and he in us. And if, on the contrary, we have reasons for apprehension, it is from active love of God and of our brothers that we will be able to derive interior certainty and peace, we will be able to "reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything." Then, too, we do not cease to be in the range of his love, which can change the state of sin into the state of grace and make our heart once more the dwelling of the Living God. All that is necessary is our response to his love. Love is the principle of divine life in our souls. Love is the law of our abiding in Christ: of the branch in the vine.

Let us love, therefore — St. John writes — let us love "in deed and in truth." Let our love prove its interior truth by means of deeds. Let us defend ourselves from the appearances of love . . . let us not love in word or in speech, but in deed and truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him."

"And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us."

We meet today, dear brothers and sisters, in St. Stanislaus' Church in Rome, to begin here the Jubilee of the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of the patron saint of Poland.

It has started simultaneously in Krakow, in conformity with the very ancient Polish tradition: May 8 and the Sunday that immediately follows this day.

Every year this solemnity is the patronal feast of the Church in Poland, and it is closely connected with the solemnity of the White Mountain Queen of Poland on May 3 and the feast of St. Wojciech at Gniezno on April 23.

In the current year, which, in relation to the ninth centenary of St. Stanislaus' death has been proclaimed a jubilee year, this annual feast of Krakow constitutes the beginning of the religious celebrations, the culminating point of which will occur on the Sunday of Pentecost and that of the Holy Trinity.

The usual gathering of Poles in the Roman Church

of St. Stanislaus recalls the important initiative of the Servant of God, Cardinal Stanislaw Hozjusz, Bishop of Warmia and one of the Pope's legate's at the Council of Trent, who founded St. Stanislaus' hospice precisely at this church. The cardinal, born in Krakow, and therefore spiritually sensitive to the cult of the holy bishop and martyr, wished to designate this place in Rome with his name, as if to remind his fellow-countrymen in Poland that they had remained in union with St. Peter's See for many centuries and must continue to remain in this union.

In the year 1579 that great ecclesiastic, a close friend of St. Charles Borromeo, died and was buried in St. Mary's Church in Trastevere, that is, in the church which is at present the titular church of the Cardinal Primate of Poland. The fourth centenary of Cardinal Hozjusz' death coincides with St. Stanislaus' jubilee this year.

Dear fellow-countrymen! The eloquence of the facts is such that it enables us to understand more adequately and deeper the Gospel of the vine and the branches this Sunday. We have abided in union with Christ since the time of the baptism of Poland and this spiritual union finds its visible expression in union with the Church.

In the year of the anniversary of St. Stanislaus' death we owe special gratitude to God who accepted the sacrifice of martyrdom and strengthened by this martyrdom our link with Christ living in the Church; And just as, during the millennium we have sung the Te Deum of thanks for the gift of faith and baptism, so we should sing the Te Deum this year in thanksgiving for the strengthening of what started with baptism.

And at the same time, meditating on the allegory of the vine and the branches, let us look at the figure of that Owner who cultivates the vineyard, looks after every branch solicitously and, if need be, prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

Understanding the meaning of this allegory more deeply, let us pray ardently and humbly, each one for himself, and everyone for everyone, that the branches will not wither and break away from Christ who is the vine.

Let us pray that the forces of irreligiousness, the forces of death, may not be more powerful than the forces of life, the lights of faith. We have lit up over Poland and over Poles all over the world the lights of the millennium. Let us all strive so that they will not be extinguished. May they shine in the same way as the cross of Stanislaus of Szczepanow shines in the hearts and consciences of Poles, indicating to them Christ who continues to be "the way, the truth and the life," of men and of nations.

More Opinions

Way to Greet New Bishop

Editor:

In this day of rising costs, increased expenses of food and utilities, and heightened awareness of the variety of needs and concerns that face the Church and indeed the wider community, we as cooperating neighbors and sharing parishes, offer this suggestion to the Church of Rochester.

Perhaps one of the best ways we can welcome Bishop Clark to the diocese would be for parishes and/or individuals to make a donation to an agency or a charity or a ministry that serves the poor, the afflicted, the hungry, and the needy members of Christ's Body. Not only would such a donation bind us with the whole Church, but its effect would be lasting and life-giving.

The Joint Staffs of St. Monica's and St. Augustine's St. Monica's 34 Monica St. Rochester, N.Y. 14619

Sees Blood On Our Hands

Editor:

Recently the British government purchased 3,000 Magnum handguns and 500 Magnum automatic rifles in the United States for use of the police in Northern Ireland. In their own country police are rarely permitted to carry arms, but life is of less concern in Ireland.

The Magnum gun is so powerful that it can knock down a wall. On impact its dum-dum bullets mushroom and spread through the victim's body. It is a weapon for all-out war, and no responsible government would use it in crowded urban areas where innocent women and children would be endangered.

The State Department could have prevented the sale, but their lame excuse is that the guns are for a uniformed police force. Would they have approved the sale to Idi Amin's uniformed police in Uganda? They should have been aware that the Royal Ulster Constabulary is a 97

per cent Protestant force with a long history of atrocities against the Catholic minority.

The British rulers are so discredited in Northern Ireland that they can now keep order only at the point of a gun. The escalation in fire power against civilians is a confession that they have abandoned the goal of law and order and substituted warfare against the hated Catholics. When will they take the ultimate step of using atomic bombs to keep the Fenians quiet?

Before God and our conscience, we Americans have blood on our hands, for we have provided the tools for the slaughter of the innocent.

Rev. Cosmas Korb, OFM Conv. St. Anthony on Hudson Washington Avenue Rensselaer, N.Y. 12144

Column Inspiring

Editor:

I would like to tell you how much the articles by Father Cuddy are appreciated by so many people.

They are inspiring, interesting and thoughtful.

I am in contact with people in all parts of the diocese at retreats, CCD conferences and Legion of Mary activities. Invariably, someone will speak of their favorite columnist Father Cuddy. I hope you realize how much these articles add to the Courier-Journal.

We hope Father's writings will continue to appear regularly each week and that they will be printed in a prominent place.

I would like to compliment you on the coverage of our bishop-elect. Those issues were very well done.

Ann M. Buckley 35 W. DeZeng St. Clyde, N.Y. 14433

Save-a-Baby Campaign

Editor:

Rochester Area Right to Life is currently cooperating with the State Right to Life in a "Save-A-Baby" campaign. Tickets are one dollar each. Two thirds of the

proceeds will go to the state organization, the remainder will go to our local legislative effort.

The State Right to Life office in Albany is a vital center for pro-life legislative effectiveness. This year no money from the people of the Rochester Diocese will be given to support this office except through the "Save-A-Baby" campaign.

If you have tickets for this campaign, please send in your donation and ask your friends and relatives to donate what they feel they can, too. If you would like tickets please call 342-0404 or 442-1620 and we will mail tickets to you, or mail your "Save-A-Baby" donation to Right to Life, 244 Hillary Lane, Penfield, N.Y. 14526.

Every phase of pro-life work involves legislative work. We cannot work effectively without our Albany office. Please help us as you have done so willingly in the past.

Jeanne D. Sweeney Chairman, Rochester Area Right to Life 35 Nob Hill Rochester, N.Y. 14617

Wants Policy Changed

Editor:

I would like to see a new diocesan policy concerning appointment of parish priests.

I realize it is difficult for a priest to have to leave a familiar parish where things are going well. And I know that the thought of losing a "good" priest is equally difficult for parishioners because I now belong to a parish in which the priests provide excellent example of what pastoral ministry and leadership should be. I certainly would not like to see either of them leave.

However, I have also recently been in a parish where I feel the pastor is not suited to parish work. I changed parishes to find the Christian atmosphere and spiritual guidance I needed for myself and my children. Parishes which need new leadership should be able to look forward to that possibility within a reasonable length of time.

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