



WEEK 4: JOHN 15

Scripture: John 15

Instructions: On the first day you pray with this guide, use the whole chapter for your prayer time. Then, highlight the sections, verses, or even phrases that strike you and spend subsequent days going more in-depth into those passages: why is God calling you to focus your attention there? Let these words sit with you even after your prayer time, and let God continue to speak to you through them throughout your day.

Reflection from Archbishop Aquila:

You can watch Archbishop's video reflections at archden.org/easter2021

Welcome to the mid-point of our archdiocesan Easter Encounter with the Risen Christ in Scripture. It is fitting that this week's reflection is the center of our journey of prayer because I consider the verses on which I want to focus today to be the standard which will lead us into mission. These have been a central theme of my time as the Archbishop of Denver and remain my core conviction in our current discernment of how to build a culture of apostolic mission.

Because I consider this such an important passage, I wish to write part of it here,

- v. 5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*
- v. 6 *Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.*
- v. 7 *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.*
- v. 8 *By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*
- v. 9 *As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.*
- v. 10 *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my*

Father's commandments and remain in his love.

- v. 11 *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*
- v. 12 *This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.*
- v. 13 *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*
- v. 14 *You are my friends if you do what I command you.*
- v. 15 *I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.*
- v. 16 *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.*
- v. 17 *This I command you: love one another.*

The entirety of this passage is about one main idea: bearing fruit. Critically, Jesus shows us here how we bear fruit. Anyone with gardening experience will tell you that a lot of preparation is required in order to have a fruitful harvest, you focus on the soil as much as the seed. Bearing fruit for us is mission. The way we bear fruit is found in two key phrases from Jesus that teach us about the soil: (1) “remain in my love” (v. 9) and (2) love one another as I love you (v. 12).

In order to bear fruit, we must first attach to Jesus, the vine, and remain in his love. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” Think of that. The perfect love that the Father has for his own son is the same love with which Christ has loved you! If I can think of one prayer I might offer for you as your archbishop, it is that the Holy Spirit would convict you of this reality so that it penetrates your heart. To remain in this love, daily, is the heart of the Christian life. And letting God love us in this way is the prerequisite for mission. Jesus calls us friends, and the more attached we are to the vine, Jesus, the deeper our friendship grows and the more we bear fruit.

Once we have received Christ’s love, we are naturally moved to develop genuine relationships with one another by loving “one another as I have loved you.” Our discipleship as Catholics is not meant to be lived in isolation! Authentic community is irreplaceable if we are to continue bearing fruit. Yet, building this kind of life-giving community is not easy. The kind of friendship that spurs each of us on to the heights of holiness and mission in our vocations must be fostered intentionally.

If our first friendship is with Jesus, then we truly chase after the adventure of the Christian life with others. We challenge ourselves in working for each other’s good. When groups of people choose to live in real friendship, which is about helping one another to strive after the heights of holiness and mission, what results is a community that bears fruit.

I believe that, in order to be fruitful in our mission, our parishes and schools need to

become places where we can remain in Christ's love and truly love one another. As was stated above, bearing fruit is about working on the soil first. For our parishes and schools to "shine before others," (Matthew 5:16), their light must first be lit by becoming places where Catholics can truly encounter Jesus personally and be invited to the kind of conversion of life that will see them be grafted fully onto the vine. Then, they need to be formed in and given a context for living out the gift of real community. These points may seem obvious, but, in practice, this is often more difficult than it seems.

Community, however, requires mission to avoid becoming stale and lifeless. As Pope Francis said in an address to the Argentine bishops, "A Church that does not go out of itself, sooner or later, sickens from the stale air of closed rooms." The same is true even for the best communities.

For us, in an increasingly non-Christian climate, we undoubtedly need good community to support our own growth in the Christian life. When God blesses us with community, however, whether it is a parish, a group of friends or even our own family, we must allow that community to become fruitful and give life to others.

The witness of Christian community is itself a distinct part of what we as a Church have to offer to the broken world. Many today crave this kind of belonging, of knowing others and being known, and our parishes need to help meet this cry of the world in Christ. Real relationships and true community are one of the great things we can offer to an increasingly connected but lonely world. Jesus tells us that he desires our happiness and joy, and that is found only in our relationship with him and one another.

What a gift it would be for even those who are antagonistic to our beliefs to see the light of our parishes, the way we love God and one another, and to say, "I might not believe everything they believe, but something about them is different." This is especially true when people see our joy. They may wonder, "what do they have that I don't have?" "Why are they happy in such a dark world?" It is because we are attached to Jesus the vine, that we have his joy and that our joy becomes complete even amid suffering, trials, and rejection by the world.

May we pray this week for a capacity in our hearts for a friendship with Christ that leads to friendship with others in community. And may this joy of the Christian life, lived compellingly, draw others to encounter Jesus Christ.