

## Bishop's Reflection – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

"I am the vine, you are the branches." If this opening line sounds like part of last week's Gospel, you are right. I am using it again, as a point of reference, to remind you that this week's Gospel is but a continuation of the one that came before. Taken together, we come to understand Jesus' great desire for us -- that we may be one with him; and that our desire for him increase.

Jesus begins by revealing the source of his love – the very love that resides within the Father's heart. With this same love Jesus provides nourishment to those that have been joined to him. Just as branches draw strength from the source of life that abides in the vine, so that same strength flows through each branch to produce the fruit that was intended.

"Abide in my love," Jesus instructs us. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." It is important to understand that this does not mean that God's love is conditional upon keeping his commandments – God's love is, in fact, unconditional; Together with his Word, his Sacraments and his Church, his commandments are an instrument by which we abide in his love. It is our connection to him, not his connection to us. The keeping of his commandments is also the way that we will forever be identified as "his friends".

If there is any doubt in what he has commanded us to do, he spells it out in no uncertain terms: "Love one another as I have loved you." Love, here, is not left up to any form of interpretation, as if, somehow, we can apply our own definitions or conditions. Just as Christ's finds his source of love deep within the heart of the Father, and embodies his Father's love to us, so in drawing life and love from him, we are called to manifest that same love to our neighbours. This love is further defined in the words, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The laying down of one's life takes more than an act of self-sacrifice. St. Paul speaks to this in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Cor. 13: 3) Pope Francis speaks of this same love as a "self-gift", joyfully and generously offered to the other (see: *Patris Corde*), which brings life into that relationship. To love as Christ calls us to do, therefore, is to draw from the love by which Christ loved us and extend it to others, thereby becoming a perfect conduit of the love and life we have in him.

The results can be seen in the fruits; fruit that isn't merely temporal, here today and gone tomorrow, but fruit that changes lives and transmits the grace that flows from its source, thereby bringing life to the world. Of that fruit we speak of joy, love, forgiveness, healing, generosity, patience and perseverance, to name a few. It is in this same spirit of love, that originates in the Father, that we can ask him, "Whatever you ask him in my (Jesus') name," and the Father will grant it. True prayer, born out of love, is but an expression of God's love that spills out, from our hearts and lips, that God's Will be done.