

My father had 5 vines in a greenhouse behind our house. He had a lot of work on them, in the spring and at the beginning of the summer. In the spring, he had to decide which vines he would let grow and which he would cut off. In the summer, he would cut away half of the tiny grapes in the bunches that were forming. So his work was mainly: pruning and cutting. But every day in September, we had nice, big and juicy grapes for weeks as an extra dessert after the meal. When my father died, none of us knew anything about grapevines. My eldest brother tried, but after two years the grapevines stopped producing good fruit.

What I still remember is the love and care with which my father treated his vines. That is why I read this piece of gospel and see in it God's care for us. His constant work to keep us connected to Jesus and ensure that our lives bear rich fruit. That is why God also prunes away what will not reach full maturity.

Try to see in your imagination the loving care that God devotes to us. Try to see the longing for unity in the image that Jesus sketches: he the vine, we the branches. Again, Jesus expresses how much God cares about being connected to us: last week the shepherd taking care of his sheep, this week we are the branches on the vine Jesus. Next week, He will call us His friends.

And Jesus continues: if you stay connected to Me, you may ask the Father whatever you want, My Father will give it to you. When we feel, see and experience so much care and love from God, what is our response? Is this the time to ask God for wealth, for health, for miracles? May we take this opportunity to place all our desires in his hands, as we did when we were children and wrote letters to Saint Nicholas about our desires?

When we ask what we need immediately and for our daily lives, do we stay connected to Christ? When we are connected with Jesus, we ask what He wants for us. And today, in the Gospel, He makes it very clear to us what He wants. The story of the vineyard owner shows us that we allow the Father to determine what can grow and flourish with us. Jesus hopes that we will not let go of Him, but allow ourselves to be pruned and purified until we remain completely connected to the Father, to Jesus and to His people. God's desire to be one with us must also become our desire. So all that we ask of God will be aimed at the unity between God and people.

In the first reading we see how far that goes. Saul, on his way to Damascus, met Jesus so intensely that he became a different person. Jesus' disciples did not trust him. But Barnabas, who is really connected to Jesus, understands and takes him to the apostles. They too recognise in Paul someone who lives connected to Jesus and who does not speak out of himself, but speaks the words of Jesus.

And in our century we see how strong this is: we have prayed for the unity of the churches for over 100 years and gradually we are growing closer together. Not only the churches, but all over the world the desire for more unity among the peoples is growing.

When we ask God for something this week, let it be for the glory of God and for more unity among people.