

Remain in me as I remain in you. I am the vine, you are the branches. Interesting, I learned, my first year as a priest, what it means to truly prune a hedge, to truly prune a tree. You have to cut it back so far that you almost kill it.

So, at Corpus Christi right now we've got these beautiful hydrangeas that we have every year that look like they're just weeds. Because they've been pruned back to where it's looks like a giant tumbleweed just planted in the ground and I've had to remind myself there's reason for this. There's a reason you have to prune things back so far because that's how they can bear fruit.

But for many of us in our lives we hate to be pruned ourselves. We hate to have things cut away from us, things taken from us, because when they are we begin to fight back and say: Why have you taken these things from me? They were beautiful, they were good, they bore much fruit! True. True story, many times, those things that are pruned away bore great fruit, but for a continual harvest, you must continue to prune so that those plants can continue to bear much fruit.

There was a saying that I heard in seminary when I went to a New Pastor's Workshop that said, "Just when you begin to feel comfortable in your position as a priest, as a pastor, as a layperson, beware! Because pruning is about to take place. Beware, because God is calling you to something more, to something deeper." And it's amazing how many times in our lives, when we finally feel comfortable where we're at, that's when a wrench is thrown in the plans. That's when everything goes haywire, that's when chaos happens. And it's not a mistake that that happens. It's God trying to prune us for something better so that we can continue to bear fruit, good fruit, that shares and professes and proclaims the love of God.

Because that my brothers and sisters is what this weekend is all about, this weekend when we talk about remaining in the Lord as He remains in us. Many times, we forget that no matter what we do, the Lord will remain in us, but do we take that a step further and remain in Him? Many times, we don't, if we're honest with ourselves. We don't remain in the Lord. We put things before God in our lives. We say with our mouths one thing, but with our actions, another, as we hear in the first readings.

But God is calling us to dispel anything that would keep His love out of our lives. Because if we dispel those things that keep us from His love, then we can truly remain in Him. It's always fascinating to me, looking at religious education classes. If you had to guess which class has the largest group of people, what would you think? First Communion. Second Grade. Which class has the largest drop off? third Grade. Remain in me as I remain in you. We go and we receive Communion, this pinnacle of our faith. And then we say I'll see you for Confirmation.

As parents our role, your role, is not just to get them to the sacraments, but to allow the sacraments to remain in your children. Last week we had a hundred and ninety-seven people in here! It was such an amazing occasion, because we had those children here to receive Communion. Today we've got space...I know we have multiple people in the marathon, but how do we remain in the Lord?

Do we plan ahead? Do we prepare our hearts not just to receive sacraments, but to offer our lives as a sacramental sacrifice itself, because of the gifts that we've been given in our lives? Because that's what it truly means to remain in the Lord. To take what He has given to us and to allow it to bear fruit within us. To always be evangelizing in

everything that we do. Like the old saying goes, preach always, when necessary use words.

Do we allow our lives to bear that fruit, or do we allow sin to dictate to our hearts that's what God is trying to prune away from us my brothers and sisters? He's trying to say you are a sinner. Accept that. And once you can accept that, now we can begin to see how sin distracts me from God. How does sin distract me from the faith life I'm supposed to have? How does sin distract me from the love of God which can conquer ANY thing which can if we allow it to permeate every thought, every action, every word, every desire in our lives, if we allow it to become our foundation?

I was talking with someone this past Friday, and we were talking about this emptiness that seems well up and reside within us. That emptiness that we try to fill and rarely do so well. That's where alcoholism comes in, sex addiction, videogame addiction, all these addictions that we have in our lives. We're trying to fill this inner longing and desire where we feel empty. The irony though, is that longing for something to be filled is really a desire within us to receive and to bear fruit of the love of God. To have dwelling within us the love of God.

Because when we were born, we were created out of the love of God. And at some point in our lives, we stopped believing that God's love can do anything. And we began to rely on ourselves. We began to be jaded towards society, we began to be jaded towards God. We began to look at life and say I can do this on my own. And then wonder why time, and time, and time again we fall flat on our face.

God's been trying to tell us all along, give to Me, remain in Me as I remain in you and you will bear much fruit. And we hear that, and I think, intellectually, we know that, but there's a disconnect between

the intellect and the will, as many philosophers have said. We have this separation between knowing what is right and doing what is right.

And so it's interesting that with this weekend's readings we have this reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Where Saul, who has had this conversion in his life. He has accepted the love of God in his life, and he wants to preach the good news. And even the disciples are hesitant. Well, this is the same guy that witnessed to and actually was ok with the stoning of St Stephen just weeks ago, now you want to call him a disciple? What? That doesn't make rational sense to us.

In our lives, we say, "No, I've seen this person do these horrific things! They've murdered, stole. How can I ever forgive them?" And then one person witnesses to what he has done, one person witnesses to his testimony, and then the words reverberate within their head, that Christ gave to them, of the Lord's prayer. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Again, based in love, we must forgive those who have harmed us.

But that, for many of us is the tension when it comes to accepting God's love. How dare God ask me to forgive someone who has offended me? How dare God ask me to do something positive for someone who has only made negative impacts in my life? How dare God ask for me to make this sacrifice?

I was listening to Catholic radio on the way over here, and there was a song that was on and it said "The sacrifice I make is nothing compared to Christ's on the Cross. Yet I don't want to make it anyway." Wow! It hit me right me right between the eyes! Touché, God, you got me on that one. The sacrifice that He made for every human being in existence is so much more than we could ever make in our own lives and yet the small little sacrifices we aren't willing to make sometimes.

We aren't willing to be pruned. We aren't willing to change. We aren't willing to strive for Heaven, but instead we'd rather just subsist and maintain in mediocrity. Because it doesn't take much effort. It doesn't take much from me to just subsist.

But at the same time, it doesn't really give us a direction. I've talked about before, do we strive to go to heaven, or do we avoid going to hell? Yes, the end is the same, but the practice in how you actually do that determines how much joy you want to have in your life.

Reminds me of the song we heard as kids, I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart! But do we have that joy down in our hearts? Or is that joy so covered with frustrations and anger, and whatever other things that keep us from the love of God?

So how will we begin this day to prune the heart of joy we are called to have in this season of Easter? To prune away those things that keep us from experiencing the joy of God in our lives? Maybe we have a relationship that we've always kind of relied on, but it's always been a kind of toxic relationship. And we always look to God and say "How can I prune so as to live?" If there's something that we do habitually that leads us to sin, or a sin that is habitual, am I willing to make the sacrifice of that space filler to prune that so as to potentially live a joy-filled, happy love-filled life?

I've talked about before about those sins in our lives that we treat like an ugly hairless cat. Mr Bigglesworth from Austin Powers. We want to stroke that cat as long as we can because we don't know what life is going to be without it. And we fear what life is going to be without it. But what does the Lord tell us time, and time, and time again? Fear is not of the Lord. It's said that there are 365 references in Scripture that say fear is not of the Lord to remind us once a day not to fear but to

place our trust in God. That if remain in Him, we will recognize him remaining in us.

But that calls us to task. It calls us to allow God to prune in our hearts and in our lives those things that don't bear good fruit, because we all have them. We all have bad habits. We all have things that, Man I know is shouldn't have done that but is did it anyways. They may be things that are minor, but still things that have to be pruned.

Procrastination is one of those things that many of us look at and say, "Ehh that's not that big of a deal." But what happens when we wait too long and leave words unsaid, and our loved ones die? What happens when we procrastinate so long and don't make it to x,y,or z, which then costs us a job in the future? What happens when we aren't there for our loved ones when they need us the most because we were taking care of ourselves? That's what we tell ourselves at least.

What things do we have in our lives that keep us from the love of God? May we have the courage, the strength, and yes, the willpower this week to truly look to God as the Vine and the Vine Grower to see what fruit He is calling us to bear in our lives. And then to not just think about it, to not just talk about it, but to go out and do what He has called us to do.