When a Branch of Your Life Isn't Bearing Fruit

A family I know had the difficult experience where one of their children was expelled permanently from school. The parents did everything they could to raise the child well, went to church, were intentional disciples of Jesus. The child was good, but just made a mistake. Everything they had all worked so hard to achieve was in danger. Understandably the child and parents all asked God, "where are you?"

This family agonised, worked hard with the school to try to come to some kind of resolution, and prayed to Jesus about it a lot. They had to struggle a long time. Eventually, the child got accepted into a very prestigious school. The child is doing very well, and hopefully will do even better than originally expected.

In that branch of the family's life, what seemed to be a dead branch, with no hope of flowering, in time, through Jesus, has blossomed into something even better.

Imagine your life like a tree. You and I can have many branches in life: friendships, school, work, love life (you're in a marriage, relationship, looking, single), relationships with family (parents, siblings, children, extended), physical health, mental health, finances, exercise, God, etc.

Those branches might be very healthy, unhealthy, or anywhere in between.

When those branches are healthy, we're happy.

When those branches are less healthy, we can try to make them healthier.

Sometimes important branches are unhealthy, we try our hardest to make them better, but the branches bear no fruit.

You, I and we can understandably ask ourselves as Christians, "where are you, Lord? You are supposed to love me. I need you now. What are you doing?"

Have you ever said those or similar words?

The Gospel, 1st reading, and psalm all speak about a vineyard – the place to grow wine.

The fact that God plants a vineyard means that God wants His people to be full of, and produce, joy! Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.[1]

The vineyard is God's people: that is, you, me, and the whole church.

The fence around the vineyard is God's covenant that surrounds and protects God's people. God's covenants are God's sacred promises to His people of His faithfulness to Israel, despite Israel's unfaithfulness.

The winepress is temple worship, where God and His people express love to each other.

The watchtower represents God's prophets warning Israel of danger.

The point of the story is that Israel could never produce the fruit of the spirit simply by following the rules.

Those rules and rituals only produce fruit through a relationship with Jesus.

John 15, Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches."

"Whoever remains in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

Jesus is saying that the church, you, me, and us, produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit to the extent that we "abide", or stay, in a personal relationship with Jesus.

[1] Galatians 5:22-23, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control."

The temptation is to move away from God when a branch of our life is not bearing fruit.

Going back to the tree and branches analogy:

- Which branch in your life is bearing fruit? Give thanks to God for this in this Mass.
- Which branch/es in your life is not bearing fruit at the moment?
- What would fruit look like?

The invitation Jesus may be making to you is:

- Can you abide, remain, stay with me in this? Even when it hurts? Even if you've been suffering for a long time?

The promise he may want to make to you today is:

- This branch may/may not disappear. It will bear fruit with me as your vine.

Prayer

Lord thank you for all the branches of my life that are bearing fruit.

Jesus there is one branch that is not bearing fruit, and it is painful.

Jesus come into my life personally, and into this branch of my life.

Help me to remain faithful to you.

Please, bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in this branch.

So that all can see how loving and powerful you are.

In Jesus' name, amen!