

Pruning is Important!

Picture in your mind's eye a master gardener, quietly at work, pruning shears in hand, smiling. God is laboring. God is involved in our lives. Even God's name, in Jesus, is God with us. God the gardener, from Genesis on, ever at work. Nurturing. Caring. Never leaving us unattended or untended.

God takes hold of me, studies me, and He sees areas where I could produce more fruit. And every so often he takes his pruning shears and snips and cuts. In those moments, of course, I'm tempted to grab the pruning shears out of God's hands and say "that hurts, leave me alone!" And to tell you the truth, I have taken them from God's hands, as if I know better.

But it is Jesus, the vine, in whom I am rooted and connected. He as the vine brings me (and you) all the nourishment we need. We are the branches, ever dependent on the Vine as our source for growth, in order that we obtain our purpose to bear fruit.

And so the Vine and the Gardner are in communion with each other to create a branch that can and does bear much fruit.

So while the image is beautiful and we need to contemplate and grow in our connectedness to the vine. **There is the matter of pruning!** To prune a plant is to cut parts of it off. **Jesus mentions it twice in our Gospel reading: Speaking as the vine, he says that the Father**

**takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes, so that it bears more fruit. (Gospel)**

**Ouch.**

**If we bring forth no fruit, we "will be thrown out like a branch and wither." If we bear some, we have to be pruned. We lose either way! It hurts either way.**

**But one hurts a whole lot more.**

The reason pruning would help is not that we should be punished, but that pruning promotes health of the whole person. As you know, I just had the opportunity to be pruned and nurtured with some intensity over the last few months. I can tell you it was not fun, to look at my weaknesses, to look at the ways I avoided life on life's terms, at the way I cope stress, and disappointments and hurts. But it was necessary, to bring this plant back to life and to bring this old tough branch back to its fruit bearing self!

Again our tendency is to see pruning as a punishment. If only I were a better person, if only I had done the right thing, if only the world were different, if only I had been dealt a better hand in the game of life, or, or, or. I wouldn't have to be pruned. It is all my fault!

But let's look at pruning as the Gardner sees pruning!

**First, has to decide whether you are bearing no fruit at all. None.** If that is really and actually true, then getting emergency help is needed, because spiritually you are dying or worse dead.

Thankfully the pruner, the Gardner, does not see us as dead or hopeless, he see the truth that most of us do bear some good fruit. And so we are challenged, discipline, or intervened up, to say...Let me help you, let me cut away that which is lifeless and does not bear fruit.

**Second,** with that settled, look at what pruning is. **It is a way to make things better, make a better plant, a better tree, a better orchard, a better Christian.** If you cut tired old flowers from your Geraniums, for instance, it will continue to bear beautiful flowers, not doing this means that the plant will go to seed and produces no more. Pruning encourages new growth and the overall health of the plant.

**Third,** In recognizing that all branches need pruning for health and growth, we from time to time submit and see the reason for pruning, not as punishment, but as the only way to promotes the health of the whole person, the whole garden, the whole orchard—the mystical body of Christ.

It also makes us aware of where our strength, and nourishment comes from, not from ourselves for we are not the vine, we are the branches.

Can you trust the steadiness of Jesus' gardener hand. Trust even while suffering the pain of it?

In order to stay attached to the Vine who is Christ, let the Word instruct you, let the body and blood of Christ and indeed all the sacraments nourish you.

Then you can say to the Lord with the rest of us, go ahead, trim whatever gets in the way! I am not the vine, I am a branch.

*My job is not to be perfect, it is to remain in you, Christ, and to let you do good within me and through me and us. To enable us to bear fruit.*