

Last week I focused on how much God loves us, of which the crucifix is a concrete sign. Today's readings should prompt us to think about how we respond to that love. How much do we love God? What are the signs of our love for God? In the terms of the gospel, the fruits we bear are the signs of our love for God.

But first—in order for us to bear good fruit, we must be firmly attached to Jesus. He is the vine, we are the branches. We cannot bear fruit on our own, we must remain rooted in him. How do we remain in Jesus? There are a number of ways.

St John tells us that to remain in Jesus means that we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing to him. How do we know what is pleasing to Jesus? How do we know his commandments? How do we know Jesus? There is a long answer and a short answer; I'll give you the short answer. We know about Jesus through the Church. The authority of the Church rests on three pillars which are: Sacred Scripture—both Old and New Testaments; Apostolic Tradition which is the living tradition of the church communicated especially through the liturgies; and the Living Magisterium which is the teaching authority of the Pope in communion with the bishops. A related image of the authority of the church is that of a three legged stool. If you pull one of the legs away, the stool will fall over. The church relies on all three legs or pillars to teach us about Jesus.

Can we learn all the Church needs to teach us through a ten or fifteen minute homily once a week? In order to know as much as we can about Jesus, we have to do more than just show up to Mass once a week. We have to take the initiative and do our homework. There are tons of resources out there to help us learn about the Church and her teachings which will help us to better know Jesus and to remain rooted in him.

If remaining in Jesus by keeping his commandments seems legalistic, how about a more accurate translation of the word “remain”? The Greek word used in the scriptures is “meno” which is more accurately translated as to dwell or live in—the way we live in our homes. The King James bible translates Jesus' words as “abide in me.” Jesus wants us to live in him. This is a more accurate sense of the relationship between the vine and the branches. They are one living unit. We cannot live if we are cut off from Jesus. That is why he left us the Eucharist. The Eucharist—Jesus' very own body and blood—gives us the nourishment we need for our journey to heaven. The Eucharist unites us to Jesus because when we consume it, Jesus becomes part of us and we become part of him.

And...because we are all consuming the flesh and blood of Jesus—to use the

bread of life imagery, we are all eating from the same loaf—the eucharist also unites us to each other.

We are all branches of the same vine and all parts of Jesus' one body. That has implications in how we live our lives and treat each other. The way we treat each other shows us how much we love God. If Jesus is physically present in every person who receives the Eucharist, what we do to that other person, we do also to Jesus. Going one step further—every single person is created in the image and likeness of God, regardless of all the ways we divide ourselves from each other. What we do to any other person, we are doing to the image of God himself. Our actions towards each other demonstrate how much or how little we love God.

When we abide in Jesus, when we abide and remain in his love, we will bear much fruit—not on our own but because of our connection to Jesus. The fruits we bear are signs of our connection to and our love for God.

St John tells us, " Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." Actions speak louder than words. How can we actively show our love for God and each other? In terms of parish communities, check the bulletin. Our bulletin has a whole list of ministries and programs which can use volunteers. We also need more volunteers for liturgical ministries: ushers and greeters, lectors, altar servers. If you have an idea for something you have an idea for something you don't see listed, great...but what usually happens to me is that someone will say "Father, we need this or that ministry, or we need more social events." And I respond, "Okay, come to me with a plan and how you would like to organize it" and I never hear from that person again. A parish community is more than just the priest, deacon, parish staff and handful of extremely dedicated volunteers. Just like a body depends on all of its parts, a parish community depends on all of its members. Jesus wants to bear great fruit through each one of us. How is he calling you to put your love into action?