

Homily: May 9, 2023

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we continue our season of celebrating the Risen Christ, we focus today on how we remain in the Risen Christ and how he remains in us. We commemorate a Belgian missionary, St. Damien of Molokai, who definitely remained in union with Christ, as he served the lepers encamped on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. Our efforts to remain fully united in the Risen Christ, falter at times by distractions and busy-ness. And so we call upon our compassionate God.

“Remain in me” definitely are the key words of today’s Gospel. They appear four times and “him remaining in us” spoken three times. The image of us being a branch of the large vine of Jesus is striking. On one hand, it seems automatic that a smaller branch remain on the larger vine. However, Jesus’ multiple request for us to “remain” in him reminds us that our relationship with him is not at all automatic. The image of a vine does not include our mutual intentionality to be in one another.

THE KEY ASPECT of a mutual relationship is **intentionality**, namely—being desirous of this mutual relationship AND being willing to do whatever for the sake of the relationship. Therefore, the question is, “How do we intentionally nurture and deepen this relationship?”

1—Jesus hints at one important way by saying, “If my word remains in you. . .” Then I still must ask myself, “How do I make it possible for Jesus’ words to remain in me, to stay in me, and to stick or cling to soul, my heart, and my thoughts?”

For Jesus and his words to remain in me, I must use the same or similar dynamics and questions as I use for a language to remain in me and grow in me.

1—I learn Jesus’ words and speak them at the same time. I learn Jesus’ words by reading them, studying about them, listening to them, like today, as the lector read from Acts and I as presider read the Gospel. And if we want these words to stick in our heart, mind, and actions or attitudes, we need to speak them—through our mouth, and also through our actions.

Besides learning Jesus’ words in a liturgy, we can personally, in a family, or group read a portion of one of the four Gospels and intentionally take the time to reflect on them and hear whatever it is that God is staying to us, or asking of us, or affirming in us. An opportunity to speak about what you and I have heard God say, will fix Jesus’ words more firmly in us. (The example of the McWhirter family reading a verse at the dinner table every evening, and sometimes making comments on the respective verse.)

2—We will not do this regular reflection unless we have good reasons or goals which motivate us to continue learning about Jesus' words and talking about them. What is yours and my strongest reasons for reflecting on Jesus' words? What are the **fruits** you and I hope to grow by remaining in Jesus, and by having Jesus' words remain in me? Fr. Damien of Molokai, whom we commemorate today, grew the fruits of deep compassion for and solidarity with the ostracized lepers of Molokai. What kind of fruit do you and I hope to bear?

I hope that by remaining in Jesus and having his words remain in me, I will gradually become more compassionate, merciful, and loving in many ways. By remaining in Jesus and by having his words remain in me, I will more completely fulfill the commandment of loving God and loving my neighbor as myself. When I do that, I believe I am also helping build the kingdom of God on this earth. To remain kingdom-of-God focused in the world we live in now, is not easy. That's why remaining in Jesus and his words is crucial for us in this age of many distractions and challenging influences.

There are still many other important reasons for remaining in Jesus and his words remaining in me. I invite you also to answer the same questions: What are your reasons for remaining in Jesus and Jesus in you?

“I AM THE TRUE VINE. . . . WHOEVER REMAINS IN ME WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT.”