



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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When Jesus proclaims that he is the vine and we are the branches, he is telling us the wonderful truth that we are plugged into the power of God, that the power that flows in and through us is divine power. How can this be, you may ask? The whole purpose of our identification with Christ in his suffering and in his death on the cross during Passiontide was that we might be identified with him in his resurrection, that we might rise with him to new life. That is what we celebrated on Easter Sunday and what we continue to celebrate during the fifty days of Eastertide as we reflect on the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternal life. If we remain connected to this source of divine power then whatever we ask God will be granted to us. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you." That is what today's gospel said. And we heard in similar words in our second reading from the First Letter of John: "We have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." If we are connected to Christ, the source of divine power, then our will will be in accord with God's will and we shall do what is pleasing to him and ask for what he knows is for our good.

Unfortunately, we have the ability to sever ourselves from the vine, to pull the plug and disconnect from the source of divine power. That is what sin does. It cuts off our divine lifeblood, and then the severed branch withers away and dies. Why would any rational and intelligent human being do such a thing? This is one of the sad consequences of Original Sin, that first sin in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve. It has left all mankind with a nature that is susceptible to evil temptations. Somehow we get it into our heads that we know better than God what will give us happiness, so we pull the plug and go our own way. God has given us freedom of choice, and it truly is free choice, not just the illusion of free choice. We have the power to say "No" to God, to reject his grace, to go against his will. He has given this power, not to do whatever we like, but rather to empower us to choose the good. It is infinitely more pleasing to God if we choose to act in accordance with his plan than if we acted out of compulsion, with no freedom.



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When we sin, God does not give up on us. He wants to reconcile us to himself. He invites us to reconnect to the source of divine power through the sacrament of Reconciliation. He offers us the grace to overcome our tendency to evil. We were first plugged into the source of divine power at our baptism. And we all renewed our baptismal commitment at Easter. Jesus' words "If you live in me, what you ask will be done for you" have become a reality again. But we have to ask. In his respect for our free will, God does not force his gifts upon us. We have to ask for them. That is what prayer is about.

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks of the intimate union between himself and those who would follow him. "Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. ... By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." This intimate union which enables us to live by the power of Christ dwelling within us is nourished at each Mass by an even more mysterious but real communion between Jesus' own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." We will be given this nourishment once again in a few moments in this Mass, as in every Mass. Let us resolve not to receive it in vain, but allow it to make us living branches connected to the vine who is Christ.