

# Connecting with the Sunday Readings

**Sixth Sunday of Easter    Gospel Word**  
John 15:9-17

This part of the Gospel according to John is full of warmth and challenge. At a Passover meal, participants drank four cups of wine. In this setting the images of vine, branches, grapes and wine would have been most clear, and would be pleasant images. Talk about growing vines and dressing vines at this point in the meal would be rich and serene. Jesus gives the images of the Father as the vinedresser and himself as the vine. A vinedresser worked with extreme care and caution. The image of the Father as a vinedresser is fully committed to bringing us to full bloom through his care. It is not a threat for the branches to either bear fruit or else. Rather, pruning will benefit the branches.

The invitation to abide in the presence of Jesus is extended here. Some translations invite the listener to remain with God through connection with Christ. What does this mean? Abiding or remaining with someone or in some place suggests that we are to stay with or live with that person or place. We abide on planet Earth. We remain in a certain country and in a specific place that we call home. In this case the branches abide through pruning. They stay put.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

When Jesus spoke these words toward the end of his earthly life, he was inviting his followers to know that the loving presence of God in him would be with us throughout our lives and until the end of time. Notice the words of the Gospel: *abide or remain* in my love. Those words make a big difference. At times, for some, the idea of God being present everywhere has an element of God being there to check up on us. God's omnipresence was like the video camera recording all activities. For some, this is not a consoling thought. Maybe that's why Jesus made sure that we knew that God's presence was a loving divine presence, right there with us, all the days and nights of our lives.

Ordinarily, we come to know God's presence through prayer and reflection. But we have to desire it, and quiet ourselves within. And that's not easy with all the others demands and needs that we face every day. Personal prayer is an essential requirement for those wanting to know the immediate presence of God's love. Sometimes we are helped to do this by taking some quiet time and reading slowly, maybe a few times, rich Gospel passages like the one for this Sunday, and allowing the words to wash over us, so we can appropriate their reality for ourselves. Hearing them proclaimed during the Sunday Eucharist is helpful, but for most, this is not enough to have the words really sink into our soul. There's an ancient practice in the Church called *lectio divina* or godly reading. This involves taking a passage (or even just a short phrase or word) and letting the word of God penetrate deep within us.

In the midst of our busy lives, the practice of quiet prayer is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Personal and work related duties can fill our days to the brim, leaving little room for anything else. We become so involved in what we need and want that we can forget those who are our fellow journeyers. Without prayer, our lives can lose their spiritual dimension or meaning. All too easily we forget that we have a spiritual life. Any sense of God's abiding Spirit in others or us seems to vanish. We forget that we are loved intensely by God every step of our way and we forget that we are called to spread that same love to others.

The harder life becomes, the more we need to be aware of God as the caring vinedresser. Rich fruit ripens in our lives when we are able to believe that "pruning" times are not times of threat. They are times of benefit and grace.

## One-line Prayer

God the Son, let us remember always that we live in your loving presence. Amen.

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

This part of the Gospel according to John is sometimes called Jesus' farewell address. It is full of warmth and challenge. Jesus was soon going to die. He was assuring the disciples that he would continue to be with them. Much of this message concerns loving relationships. They and we are to translate being loved by God into loving each other. It would be easy to think of religion as concerning only our relationship with God. God and me: a cozy twosome taking delight in each other. But such a view of God would not be faithful to Jesus' words. He draws a direct connection between love of God and love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is *the* expression of our love for God. This Sunday's Gospel reading ends with the clear statement that Jesus' commandment is that we love each other.

## A Gospel Word for the Home

### John 15:9-17

In today's Gospel reading we encounter the invitation **to abide in the love of Jesus**. Some translations invite us **to remain** with God through our connection with the Christ. What does this mean? Abiding or remaining with someone or in some place suggests that we are to stay with or live with that person or place. We abide on planet Earth. We remain in a certain country and in a specific place that we call home. But what does this mean when it includes persons? First of all, we become **present** to them. We think about them, we are conscious that they are close to us. We share our daily lives with them.

So when Jesus spoke these words toward the end of his earthly life, he was inviting the disciples (and us) to know that he would be with us until the end of time. But it was not only simple presence that he was referring to, but also **loving** presence. God in Jesus deeply loves us. Notice the words of the Gospel: abide or remain **in my love**. And that makes a big difference. Years ago the idea of God being present everywhere was used to remind children to be obedient and good even if their parents were somewhere else. They were reminded that God was there; checking on whether they did what they were told like brushing their teeth, doing assigned chores, or feeding the dog. God's omnipresence was like the video camera recording all activities. For some children, this was not a consoling thought. Maybe that's why Jesus made sure that we knew that God's presence was a loving divine presence, right there with us, all the days and nights of our lives.

### Thought for the Week

God's presence is described as a spiritual closeness. God cannot be directly seen or felt unless he wills to be known in a special way. Some saints have mentioned a tangible sense of God's presence but this has been viewed by the Church as exceptional. Ordinarily, we come to know God's presence through prayer and reflection. But we have to desire it, and quiet ourselves within. And that's not easy with all the others demands and needs that we face every day.

Personal prayer seems an essential requirement for those wanting to know the immediate presence of God's love. Sometimes we are helped to do this by taking some quiet time and reading slowly, maybe a few times, rich Gospel passages like the one for this Sunday, and using the words as stepping-stones to God. Hearing them proclaimed during the Sunday Eucharist is helpful, but for most of us, this is not enough to have the words really sink into our soul. There's an ancient practice in the Church called **lectio divina** or godly reading. This involves taking a passage (or even just a short phrase or word) and letting the word of God penetrate deep within us. Even children can do this. It will help us all remain or abide more fully in God's love.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

## Parent Survival

To continue with this idea, the practice of quiet prayer is surely needed by busy parents. Our parental duties can fill our days right to the brim, leaving little room for anything else. Without prayer, our lives can lose their spiritual dimension or meaning. All too easily we forget that we can even have a spiritual life. Any sense of God's abiding Spirit seems to vanish. We can forget that we are loved intensely by God every step of our way.

The harder life becomes, the more we need an awareness of God. When we know that we are not alone in dealing with life's difficulties, it is so much easier and enjoyable to face them. A line from today's Gospel reading: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." We have been told. But we must remember it.

## Car or Meal Talk

Ask each other about a time when you sensed the presence of God.

## One-Line Prayer

Creator, let us remember always that we live in your loving presence. Amen.