

INSPIRED WORD
March 16, 2016

TEACHING / SCRIPTURE / SHARING

Welcome to week five of our Lenten series of “Growing Seeds of Holiness”. These weekly Lenten sessions are bringing us closer to Jesus and to the Father. I think some of the scripture readings and some of the actions that are listed in our weekly hand-outs are a little challenging at times. Tonight we will be talking about “**Pruning and Bearing Fruit.**” Pruning is necessary in order to bring new growth. Marilyn will be our speaker tonight.

Marilyn speaking: We are talking about pruning, and in this session it means allowing the Lord to take away those things that separate us from Him. It is a big deal! The first thing that we need to do is to acknowledge Jesus and make Him the Lord of our lives. The next thing we need to do is establish a personal relationship with Jesus, which is vital. There can be no pruning done without that relationship with Jesus. Then we are going to talk about some of the idols that we hold on to, and then we will have some reflection time about these idols.

So the **first** thing that we have to do is **make Jesus the Lord of our lives**. Scripture says in **John 15: 1 – 2: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does He prunes so that it bears more fruit.”** He takes the bad branches off the vine, and He prunes the branches that are bearing a little bit of fruit, so that they will bear more fruit. That is what we need to do! So what does it mean to make Jesus Lord of our lives and what does that have to do with pruning? We need a guideline to follow – some perfect person out there who knows you best. He would be the one to tell you what to prune. There are many attributes of Jesus and they tell us that He is the right and perfect One. He has a plan for each of us. Sometimes I feel like I know what that plan is for me, and that I am actually following it. Sometimes I feel like I am not following it. We define the word **Lord** to help us make Jesus Lord of our lives. He is a Person Who has great authority, and He is the Ruler of our lives. Jesus is kind and loving, just, merciful, good, faithful, and all-knowing, the Almighty God Who is trust worthy. Jesus is the Head of all creation. The Father created all things through Jesus and in His image, that all creation and all history finds its purpose in Him, and that all men are meant to be reconciled to the Father in Him. So this is the best source we can use for our pruning, to find the ideal and to use Jesus. Jesus is the only way to the Father, and to man’s fulfillment – that vision that we have.

So the **second** thing we have to do is **make that personal relationship with God, with Jesus**. If we don’t know Jesus and if we don’t listen to Jesus, we won’t know what to prune. As **John 14:6** says, “**I am the way and the truth and the life.**” Jesus knows each and every one of us; in fact He knew each one of us before we were even born. **Psalms 139** says: “**For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb, I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works. My bones were not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; in Your book they are all written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be.**” (**Verses 13 – 16**) So we were out there with Jesus before we were even formed in our mother’s womb. So we have

no one better to advise us on our pruning, but Jesus, and we can totally trust in Him. Jesus is close to everyone, both individually and when we are gathered together. So when we are in groups like this, Jesus is working among us individually and as a group to make us stronger. Jesus also works outside of us in shaping events and within us, to strengthen and console us in the middle of our challenges. Several years ago I worked across town and I didn't like to drive home in the dark during the winter. I left work in the dark and had to drive here to the eastern part of town – I didn't like it at all. I prayed about it and God led me to Sierra Madre, where the Giuseppe's Depot used to be. All along there at Christmas time the shops were lit with bright colored lights, and Giuseppe's Depot was all lit with white lights. So God showed me the way to go through that difficult time, and I drove past all those lights the entire time it was dark. So God is with us! I had tutored some of my grandchildren, and that is a way of reaching out and touching somebody. You find a neighbor who needs help, maybe they can't shovel the snow in their driveway and sidewalks, so help them by doing the shoveling for them. So in recognizing Jesus as Lord, and the things that He is doing in our lives, our response must be to trust in Him as the Lord of our lives.

So here comes the hard part – **the idols that we hold on to**. I found this rather challenging. God tells us what our idols are – where do we spend our time? Where is our energy? Where do we spend our money? The first commandment says: **“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”** (Reference: **Matthew 22: 37**) God is constant and unchangeable, faithful and just without any evil. He is almighty, merciful and infinitely good. Do I sometimes think or act as if He is not? Do I sometimes think or act as if God is not Almighty; as if He is not merciful, infinitely good? What are the present day idols that we worship, that we refuse to give over to Jesus? What are we placing ahead of Him? What do we trust in, or want, more than Jesus? If you will sit quietly while I read some of these idols, let Jesus tell you if some of these are your idols. Do we have habits of sin (e.g. jealousy, impurity, selfishness, sins that may have been with you for years) and that have become part of you? Sins that we think that Jesus can't handle; or sins that we think He won't want to help us with; or we don't think that He is merciful enough to handle them. Are money and material possessions my God? They are, if I value them more than the people in my life; or if I spend more time focused on them, than on my family or friends. Do I trust my income to provide me with what I need instead of truly trusting God and His timing? With possessions, am I a hoarder of the wrong things? As for work, would you rather work, rather than spend time with Jesus, or with your family? Is work the center of your life? Individualism – am I more important than others? In **1 Peter 4: 10**, it says: **“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.”** As we have gone through each of these idols, and as we have gone through each of these Lenten sessions, we need to thank Jesus for opening our hearts. Rather than being afraid of the next step, stop and rejoice that you have been touched by Jesus Christ.

SHARING / TEACHING / SCRIPTURE

Ernie speaking: Some of the toughest things in my life were to give up some of those idols that I have had in my life. After giving up the idols, we want to bear fruit – God calls us to bear fruit. The opening song that we sang tonight is called, “Perfect”, and it is one of my favorite songs. Some of the words in the song are: “We are not made to more than just survive, **we are made to thrive.**” That is what it means to bear fruit, to thrive. So we want to continue to grow not only in holiness, but to cultivate that to sustain. God calls us to bear fruit, however, there is one thing we have to do and that is to cooperate with God. **We have**

to let go! We cannot grow in holiness if we hang on to those things, such as unforgiveness and such. As we cooperate with God, the Holy Spirit causes the seeds of our cooperation to grow, the results being the fruits of the Spirit. The **Catechism** says this: **By this power of the Spirit, God's children can bear much fruit. He Who has grafted us onto the true vine will make us bear "the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."** (Reference: CCC paragraph 736 / also ref: Galatians 5: 22 – 23) **"We live by the Spirit"; the more we renounce ourselves, the more we "walk by the Spirit."** (Reference: CCC paragraph 736 / also ref: Galatians 5: 25) I found this scripture interesting, because of this scripture in **John 12: 24: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."**

I was thinking to myself and wondering how that worked – me and my simple mind, right? You have to die to yourself – renounce ourselves; and that is a tough thing to do. I am still working on it in my own life. Trust me, I am not there yet. So in the literal sense, we think of fruit being the olives, and the fig as mentioned in the Old Testament and New Testament. Symbolically, we think of fruit as the 'fruit of the vine' 'fruit of the womb', or "fruits of your labor". Me, personally, I started thinking of it as doing something that is bigger than me, and that is for the Body of Christ, for God's work. And that is how I think of it. So bearing fruit also means sharing what God has done in us, to give His love away through evangelizing. By living the way He wants us to live, virtuously, thus serving as an example of "Christ living in us".

I want to share this: we had a Life in the Spirit Seminar at Saint Dominic's Church last year, I believe, and I was asked to give a talk, which I did. Later on that evening, an older man, about my father's age, came up to me and he said, "Your talk really touched me, it really did." Whatever I said in that talk, this older man, whom I respect because of his age, actually thanked me for my talk because it reached out to him and touched him in a special way. I give all of the credit to God for this! To me, that is producing fruit of the Spirit because you are reaching out and touching someone. Again, I take no credit; it is all to the Lord our God! Sometimes I go to Schriever Air Force Base and as you walk out of portals going back to your vehicle, it says something to this effect: "The mission is not accomplished, it is just a journey." Growing in holiness is not an arrival at some 'destination', rather it is a life-long journey of growing in love for God and others, day by day. In **John 15: 5**, it says: **"He who abides in Me and I in him will bear much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."**

I used to think that I could do everything on my own. I am just throwing this out there, because I am assuming that everyone may have thought that same thing some time in their lives. I learned the hard way and quickly became humble, but being humbled is a daily task in life. Anyway, we are growing all the time, and as Marilyn said, we have to continually prune and cut the bad branches off. But don't stand there idly and expect great things to happen. No, **God calls us to bear fruit!**

EXHORTATION

Sometimes it is also necessary for the gardener, in his wisdom, to prune back unruly growth. It can be shocking to view a newly pruned tree. It can appear to be a trunk with nothing but studs sticking out. Stark as it may appear, it is a tree that has been carefully pruned that will grow the most in the spring. We too are called to do some pruning. We can grow some

unruly idols throughout the year that choke out growth. These idols began to become more important than the vine to which we are attached. They can begin to eat into our priorities and values. Where are you in most need of cutting back, so that you can grow fresh and strong? Once the gardener has chosen the seed, the fruit of the plant is determined. A lemon can no longer become a peach, than can we become someone else. The beauty is that we are not called to be someone else. God planted exactly the seeds in us that He desires to see flourish. Just as the seed is not fulfilled until it bears fruit and is shared, so too, are we unfulfilled if we do not bear fruit and share with others. We bear fruit by sharing our story! God's beauty shines through our lives and together we make a diverse and rich cornucopia of God's bounty.

PRAYER

The Lord wants to touch us tonight and to embrace us. He wants to draw us close. So, Lord, here we are, Your people, gathered here in this place. We come to give You praise, Lord; praise for Your magnificence, for Your mercy, for Your love, care and concern. We want to bow down and worship You because You are holy, holy, holy!!

IMAGE / PROPHECY / SCRIPTURE

I had an image of a rose, but the rose didn't have any thorns; it just had beautiful blossoms and they looked like diamonds. I asked the Lord what it meant. He said these words, (as in the Song of Songs): **"Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my dearest compared to other men. I love to sit in its shadow, and its fruit is sweet to my taste. He brought me to his banquet hall and raised the banner of love over me. Restore my strength with raisins and refresh me with apples! I am weak from passion. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand caresses me. Promise me, women of Jerusalem, swear by the swift deer and the gazelles that you will not interrupt our love. I hear my lover's voice. He comes running over the mountains, racing across the hills to me. My lover is like a gazelle, like a young stag. There he stands beside the wall. He looks in through the window and glances through the lattice. My lover speaks to me. Come then my love; my darling, come with me. The winter is over; the rains have stopped; in the countryside the flowers are in bloom. This is the time for singing; the song of doves is heard in the fields. Figs are beginning to ripen; the air is fragrant with blossoming vines. Come then, my love; my darling, come with me. You are like a dove that hides in the crevice of a rock. Let me see your lovely face and hear your enchanting voice. Catch the foxes, the little foxes, before they ruin our vineyard in bloom. (Ref: Song of Songs, chapter 2)** To me, this affirmed what we have been hearing and learning tonight, that we are to bloom and with all of the pruning that we have been doing, He is just loving us. He is just reminding us that He is our Lover and He loves us deeply.

TONGUES

PROPHECY

Now I say this to you, My beloved, I desire to speak with you. Know this first, My beloved, I love you; **deep in your hearts know that I love you!** Daily I require something of you; yes, you may call it pruning, but I call it a desire for you to grow. But, My beloved, I say this to you, you cannot grow if you do not believe that I love you. So deep in your hearts, accept these words – **I, the Vine, speak to you. In order to grow, you must believe that I love**

you! And once you believe those words, then you can go forth. You can go forth and share with others the love that I have for them. **That is My desire for you, to grow and to feed others!**

INTERPRETATION

I satisfy, and when you are thirsty, I quench the thirst. When you are frightened, I console. When you feel despondent, I pour forth My love. When you turn away, I pull you back. I love you; I embrace you, and nothing can ever stop that. Come to Me! **Come to Me and experience My love!**

SCRIPTURE / PRAYER

“I will raise him back to life.” **(Reference: John 11: 23)** And when Jesus said this, He called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out with hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” **(Reference: Verses 43 – 44)** Lord, You have called us out of ourselves, You have called us out of places where we are struggling and there are dead spots, some minor, some major. You have called us out and said to take off the grave cloth and go free. “Let them go!”

SUMMARY / SCRIPTURE

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!” We are coming to the end of our evening. When we sing a song like that – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty”, and we hear the words of love that have been spoken tonight, and the scriptures that were read, and the prophetic word, we began to understand what Peter said at the Transfiguration, “Lord, can we build a tent and stay here with You?” **(Reference: Matthew 17: 1 – 8: The Transfiguration)** We are singing with all the angels and saints to the Holy One, Who is seated on the throne, and to the holy One Who said, “I love you, and My pruning you causes you to come closer to Me.”

EXHORTATION

So as we come to a close tonight, let's end with this: “Science has allowed incredible shortcuts in the development of the seed's maturity. But there is no such thing as “Hot-house holiness.” Hot-houses often produce one season plants. God has created us for the long haul, a perennial, if you will. We may go through dormant cycles, but we are called to dig deep inside to find places for new life to bloom. There are no more shortcuts; holiness is a life-long journey! We continue to grow through the cycles of growth so that we may be open to where God seeks life in us. God is the Master-gardener! He tends to each plant in His garden individually, and knows our deepest needs. We receive care and love whether it is in the form of nourishment - like a gentle rain, correction - like a needed pruning, direction - like the warm sunlight, strength - like being staked up, or renewal - like being fertilized. We can be like ordered gardens, or like wild flowers. It is the wind of the Holy Spirit Who has carried us to where He wants us to grow and bear fruit. Though it may feel like the elements will get the best of you, He never takes His eye off of you! So be prepared to grow and break new ground. You are to bring new life and beauty to a world longing for hope.