

What kind of branch are you? That's the question that Jesus wants us to ask ourselves after he describes how our relationship with him is like branches to a vine. Christ is the vine, the Father is the vine grower, and we are the branches. And there are two types of branches: branches that produce fruit, and branches that do not. Those that do not produce fruit will be taken off the vine by the vine grower and burned. Those that do produce fruit will remain on the vine and be pruned, so that they can produce even more fruit.

So which kind of branch are we? Are we the kind of branch that is producing fruit, or are we the kind that is not? The only way to answer that question is to look for the fruit. And what is the fruit that the Father wants to see? Holiness. I spoke last week about the Pope Francis' exhortation in which he pointed out that most of us are called to be middle class saints. It's not that we have to be famous for our holiness. We are simply called to live our daily lives with extraordinary love.

The Father pours His grace into us, loves us and cares for us constantly, and He does so with the expectation that it will produce results in our lives, that it will bear fruit. So are we living a holy life? Do we exercise patience, humility, generosity, love of our neighbor? This is the fruit that our Lord is looking for, the fruit that He works in our lives to help us produce. If we do not see this fruit, this is our wake-up call that we are the kind of branch that

gets cut off from the vine. We must begin now to develop these virtues if we wish to remain in him. If our lives are centered on getting what *we* want, if we give no thought to how we can help others, being selfish and uncaring towards our neighbor, we are living a life that is separated from God.

But hopefully, we do recognize some virtue in our lives, some fruit that our Lord helps us to produce. And hopefully, we desire to produce even more of the same, to grow even more in holiness. But to do this requires some pruning, just as a vine needs to be pruned in order to produce greater fruit.

We probably know what things we have in our lives that are keeping us from growing closer to God. They are the things we choose to do instead of spending time in prayer, or those things that we guard jealously if someone tries to take them away. They might not be evil in themselves, but our attachment to them is. To grow in holiness, to produce the fruit the Lord desires of us, we must choose to prune those things out of our lives, even if only to prove that we can, as painful as that may be for the time being.

Let us cut away anything in our lives that keeps our holiness from being our first priority, so that we can produce the fruit of holiness that He longs to see.