

So once there was a man from a remote mountain village who had the opportunity to visit a large modern city for the first time. He had never been out of the mountains before, and so had not experienced many modern conveniences – like running water, indoor plumbing, and electricity.

He of course wanted to bring something home with him to show off to his neighbors. Since he was most amazed at the electric lights he saw everywhere, he decided that's what he wanted to bring home with him.

So, he bought a sack full of bulbs and sockets and switches – all to take home with him.

Arriving home – he hung the light bulbs in front of his home – and on trees and shrubs.

Everyone watched him with great curiosity and kept asking him what he was doing. He just smiled at them and said, “just wait until dark – then you will see.”

When night came – he turned on the switches – but nothing happened. . . . No one had told him about electricity! And he did not know that light bulbs were useless unless they were connected to a source of power.

IF we have been listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd calling to us --- not just this past week, but throughout our lives as Christians – then a consistent message the good shepherd gives us in his still, quiet voice is: *“apart from me – you can do nothing --- but with me, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.”*

You see, I think there are a lot of people today who want to call themselves Christians – and have no idea that means they have to stay connected to Jesus – as the source of the spiritual power in their lives.

And I think they do this for a couple of reasons: 1st – staying connected to Jesus takes time and effort: and they are not willing to put that time and effort in.

And closely related to the first – staying connected to Jesus means that they have to disconnect themselves from other things – all the things that they are bombarded with in so many different ways by the media that tells them this or that -- will bring them success, or power, or happiness, or contentment. Little wonder, then, they might have time for all kinds of other things – but have no time to devote to staying connected to Jesus.

Allow me to state the obvious: IF we want to truly call ourselves Christian – then we have to stay connected to Jesus as the source of our spiritual power. >>

Which is a way of saying that our values, our priorities, our expenditures of time, talent, and treasure: need to flow from our commitment to staying connected to Jesus Christ.

HOW DO WE STAY CONNECTED TO CHRIST?

Through Prayer: the lifting up of our minds and hearts to God.

Through Meditation: not feeling the need to say anything to God, but just enjoying being in his presence – much like we do with friends, or a spouse: just being with each other is a source of strength and contentment in and of itself.

We stay connected to Christ **through our reading of Scripture** – the great biblical scholar St. Jerome (who translated the scriptures from Greek into Latin) once said: “ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of God. . .” I think we may have a few ignorant people in the church today who are content with allowing dust to collect on their Bibles --- rather than dusting them off and spending time with the sacred word of God.

We stay connected to Christ by **walking with like-minded people in the family of the Church.** Knowing that a truly Catholic journey with Christ is NOT just a Jesus and me experience – but a Jesus and WE experience.

We stay connected to Christ **through the use of sacramentals in our lives**: the rosary, the use of holy water, the wearing of medals or the scapular, the use of icons or other sacred images: all to remind us of the loving presence of God in our lives.

We stay connected to Christ by our **works of charity** – ever mindful of the fact that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Christ, himself.

And we stay connected to Christ **through the celebration of the Sacraments – especially the Eucharist**. Again recognizing that as individuals we are part of something much greater than ourselves – we are members of the Body of Christ, which has many parts.

All of these ways of staying connected to Christ – take time and effort – and it means the sacrifice of doing other things --- which, again, is why a lot of people are Christian in name only – for they want to put their time and effort into other “more useful” things. . .

A spiritual director of mine many years ago once told me: “when you finally see that prayer is a good use of your time – then you will find time to pray. . . instead of saying you are too busy. . .”

If we stay connected to Christ – and that connection is as close as a vine to its branches – then we produce fruit. And the fruit we produce – is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as given to us by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians (and I especially remind our newly Confirmed of these):

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.

Don't our families need these gifts in them? Doesn't our Church, especially here in Kansas City-St. Joseph, desperately need these gifts? Certainly our world would be much better off with an abundance of these gifts at work? ----- so this week – let's get busy producing fruit!!

Perhaps this prayer of Fr. Ed Hayes might be an inspiration for us:

Lord Jesus, all my fruit is yours – for you are mine.
The root and stem from which my tendrils twine. You are the wine that swells my tender grapes. My leaves are hands uplifted to the light. Each palm grows bright to catch the falling sun.
And when the waiting nets of night are wide to hold earth's ripeness – we are one: root, branch and leaf and rounding fruit in life's full circle.

White root, go deep that in your tunneled darkness I may sleep. Strong branch, reach high till my green hands, glad servers of the sun – receive the cup of water and of fire and find it brimmed with wine --- I drink to you, drain you till my life is yours, and yours is mine. AMEN!

[The Vine. Rev. Ed Hayes]