

"I am the vine you are the branches. You are pruned already by means of my word. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples". John 15:5, 8

John by recalling the words of Jesus is inviting us to a deeper relationship with Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus is not just doing and saying things of faith but it is to have a personal relationship with the Lord and to bear fruit.

Pope Francis reminded a catholic community recently of the danger of being merely functionaries. He said "*We must be very careful not to fall for the illusion of functionalism*".(30/4/21) This can happen to us all, we fall into a way of doing or practicing our faith without the deep personal relationship with the Lord and thus bearing no fruit.

Our relationship with Jesus comes about by prayer. "*Make your home in me as I make mine in you*". Through Baptism, Christ Jesus comes to abide in us and we in him. Prayer opens us up to the power of Jesus working within us. Prayer enables us to discern the path God asks us to walk on. Prayer gives us the sight to see as Jesus does. As disciples of Jesus our relationship with him is not just to do as he commands, to follow the rules, but to have a personal relationship with Jesus which is enhanced through prayer. To be a disciple is to be a person who prays, often. Prayer bears fruit in our lives.

You are pruned already

Prayer allows the word of God to be effective in our lives and this Word and Prayer are the pruning instruments of the Lord. The Lord often provides opportunities for pruning. Pruning is to cut off the dead branches that life may sprout in another area. The Holy Spirit is that power that gives new life and surprises us. Pope Francis in the Joy of the Gospel challenges us to the following:

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities." 33.

The pandemic while not of God's making is a moment for pruning. Many talk about getting back to normal after the pandemic, of going back to what we were doing in the way we were doing it. But this pandemic is an opportunity for us to prune within society and the world, to change what needs changing for the better. It is also an opportunity for pruning in the Church. The way we did things before, did they bear fruit? Did they 'make' better Christians? The 'normal' way of doing things –did it bear fruit?

In 2019 less than half of all marriages in Ireland were celebrated as Catholic Marriages. What does this say to us about the way we were doing things? Though we have fewer Marriages we still have many Baptisms, what is going on here? What does it mean to be baptised? We still have many seeking the Sacraments for children and young people, but is there prayer in the home, is there a commitment to Witness to Christ and to practice faith. There has been a greater call for young people to get back to sport and training than there has for them to get back to worship. I mention these as examples of our society today and the complexity of faith in our time. The way we have celebrated Sacraments has been on hold for months now, but if we go back to the 'normal', what pruning has been done?

There are new buds sprouting in the Church in Ireland and all over the world but it will take time, courage, encouragement and perseverance for them to bear fruit.

Pruning is essential for new life to sprout. Prayer enables us to discern what needs pruning, what needs to change, what needs to die. As we prepare for a National Synod in the Church, a question for us is: 'How do we witness as Christian Disciples in the Ireland of today?'

In the Acts of the Apostles we hear of the early Church being pruned, it cuts away from Jerusalem to spread to other lands and peoples. Paul and Barnabas's lives are changed and pruned so much that they may take a new direction having discerned the will of God. May we imitate them in opening our lives to Jesus through prayer and the God's Word. May our lives bear fruit flowing from a personal relationship with the Lord.

It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples. Jn. 15:8