

✠ John 15:1-11 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

“I say these things to you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full.” Jesus’ words bring comfort and healing to an otherwise ominous proposition and circumstance.

Already our Lord has told His disciples that He will be taken from them and they will see Him no more. Already He has warned them that the ruler of this world is coming to claim His life, even though he has no true claim on Him. He has told them that though they have followed Him thus far, coming through ridicule and hatred because they were with Him, they will not be able to follow Him still further. Rather, He must leave them so that He might fulfill the will of God.

One of them, one of His closest companions and friends will betray Him into the hands of wicked men bent on evil desires. The rest will fare no better as they desert Him and deny Him.

Already our Lord has set the mood for this evening. The night promises nothing but fear and sorrow, death and pain.

But now Jesus comforts and consoles. For it is not like our Lord to leave us in the dark and scare us out of our wits. Instead He is our friend who cares for us so deeply that He is willing to lay down His life for us. So He does not leave us without words of comfort that are meant to override and supercede the evil that is before us.

“My Father is the vinedresser.” It is the Father who prunes and shapes, cuts and hacks until the vine is as He wants it; producing the fruit He desires. It is according to the Father’s will and plan that the Son die for the sins of the world. The Vinedresser prunes and cuts so that the vine is shaped, best prepared to give the fruit the Vinedresser demands of it. And so Jesus, the true Vine, suffers and dies; pruned by the Father.

And behold the fruit of the vine. It is beautiful in the eyes of God. It is holy because the Vine is holy. It is pure because the Vine is pure. It lives because the Vine lives. The fruit of the Vine is the Christian Church. All those who are baptized and believe in Jesus and hold to the one true catholic faith are members of her, fruit of her branches and the delight of our heavenly Father.

The devil and all of his angels, the world and all of its evil come and hack and cut, trying to destroy the Christian Church which looks so small and frail in comparison to the might of the world. But it is as Joseph said to his brothers when they had sold him as a slave to Egypt: “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” It is God who has the clippers and hoe in His hands and wields them like the Master He is.

God is in control. It is He who says to the devil and the world, “You mean to do my children harm and bring disaster upon them, but I will use you for my purpose so that my children will love me even more and depend upon me even more.” The devil and all of his works are the tools by which our heavenly Father cuts and prunes, shapes and cultivates so that we, His children, produce the fruit that He delights in.

This is comforting and precious in the sight of the saints. For if it were left to us we would rather it not be this way. From the standpoint of the vine or the branches it looks devastatingly painful. If the vine or branches could speak and talk back to the Vinedresser they would say, "What are you doing? That hurts! Leave off! If you continue to prune and cut I shall have to wither and die."

But our Father knows what He is doing and responds back, "Keep silent you fool. If I do not prune you of that which is useless and harmful you will be overrun by evil and good for nothing but feeding the fire. It is for your good that I come with pruning shears and manure. Yes they look terrible and feel wicked, but I have them and they shall not cut too deep or prune of their own desire. I am the Vinedresser, trust me." Thus are we comforted in our afflictions.

With these words true Christians learn to have a view of the suffering that we endure for the sake of Jesus' name that is far different from what appears on the surface and before the world. The Christian Church is not afflicted without God's counsel and will; that when this does happen, it is a sign of grace and fatherly love, not of wrath and punishment, and it serves our welfare.

In this way God teaches us to fear, trust, and love Him above all else. For when we do that we abide in Jesus and He in us. Just as He says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love." The branches that do not produce this fruit are cut off and destroyed. They are the false Christians who spout their opinions and desires above the words of our Lord. They fret and fight over power and position, and authority and influence. They desire their comfort and peace above the rebuke and salvation of God.

God has no room for them on His vine and so He will clip them off though they think themselves indispensable to His kingdom and His Church. He will cut them off so that they wither and die, causing no more harm to come to His people.

The Church of God will continue until the Lord's return and even thereafter into eternity, for the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Therefore repent. Repent of desiring your way over God's way. Repent of your sin of rebellion and sedition. The pruning shears are poised over you to clip from you the sin that causes you grief and produces in you rotten fruit. Confessing your sins is not fun. It is not comfortable or particularly enjoyable. But it is the fruit of listening to God's Word and believing the promises of God in Christ.

For whoever confesses their sins has an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ, who will show the Father not your sins and wickedness, but His righteousness and holiness. Let your heavenly Father prune you and clip from you that which sucks the life from your soul and will lead you down the path of destruction. God is faithful and just and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

These things have been spoken to you that the joy of the Lord may be with you and that your joy may be full.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠