

Receive the Holy Spirit: Christ's breath is our eternal breath. Jesus is the Good Shepherd: Jesus' life is our life. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches: Our love is the fruit of Christ's love.

The imagery of Easter continues to build, each image addressing the relationship of Christ crucified and risen to us, his disciples. Each image drawing us more deeply into the mystery of our unity with God in Jesus, the Christ.

The image of the vine and the branches would have been very familiar to the people of Jesus' day. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is referred to as the vine brought out of Egypt by God and planted in its own soil. This image was such a central part of Israel's self-understanding that, around the pillars of the entrance to the temple and across the lintel, was woven a golden grape vine.

People would donate a golden leaf or a cluster of grapes to be hung on this spectacular vine that all would pass through as they entered the Temple. This image was also close to the hearts of early Christians. Grape vines were painted on the walls and ceilings of the catacombs recalling this teaching of Jesus.

As Catholics, the image of the vine and branches draws our minds to the celebration of the Eucharist. When we gather for Mass, we celebrate that our life emanates from Christ. We listen to Christ's words in the Sacred Scriptures. These words both feed our souls and prune our lives. The pruning is just as important as

the feeding. Pruning keeps us healthy. It enables us to produce better, more intense fruit. A vine dresser only prunes to improve the productivity of the branch.

Christ's word helps keep our lives focused on the will of the Father. The celebration and reception of the Eucharist gives us a profound experience of Christ's life running through our veins, filling our souls with life.

When we sit in silent prayer after receiving Communion, our vocation in life is clear: Christ is the vine; we are the branches. His life infusing our souls with love, compelling us to bear the fruit of love.

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