

St Cyril of Alexandria on the Gospel of St John; 5th Sunday of Easter Year B

I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser

He wishes to show us that it behoves us to love, to hold fast to our love towards Him, and how great a gain we shall have from our union with Him, when He says that He is the Vine, by way of illustration; and that those who are united and fixed and rooted in a manner in Him, and who are already partakers in His nature through their participation in the Holy Spirit are branches; for it is His Holy Spirit Which has united us with the Saviour Christ, since connexion with the Vine produces a choice of those things which belong to It, and our connexion with It holds us fast. From a firm resolve in goodness we proceed onward by faith, and we become His people, obtaining from Him the dignity of Sonship. For according to the holy Paul, *He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit*. As then in other places He has been called the foundation and coping-stone by the voice of the prophets, for upon Him we are built up, ourselves being the stones, living and spiritual stones, into *a holy priesthood for a habitation of God in the Spirit*, and in no other way are we able to be built up into this, save only if Christ be the coping-stone, so here by a similar reflection

He says that He is a Vine, as it were the mother and nourisher of its branches. For we are begotten of Him and in Him in the Spirit, to produce the fruits of life; not the old life of former days, but that which consists in newness of faith and love towards Him. And we are preserved in our hold on this life by clinging as it were to Him, and holding fast to the holy commandment given to us, and by making haste to preserve the blessing of our high birth; that is, by our refusing to grieve in any way whatever the Holy Spirit That has taken up His abode in us, by Whom God is conceived to dwell in us. For in what manner we are in Christ and He in us the wise John will show us when He says: *Hereby we know that we are in Him and He in us, by the Spirit Which He gave us; and again, hereby know we that we are in Him; he that said he abided in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked*.

And he makes this even clearer to his hearers by the words, *He that kept His commandments abided in Him, and He in him*. For if the keeping of His commandments worked love towards Him, and we are joined to Him by love, surely what has been said has been shown to be true by these quotations. For just as the root of the vine ministers and distributes to the branches the enjoyment of its own natural and inherent qualities, so the Only-begotten Word of God imparts to the Saints as it were an affinity to His own nature and the nature of God the Father, by giving them the Spirit, insomuch as they have been united with Him through faith and perfect holiness; and He nourishes them in piety, and worked in them the knowledge of all virtue and good works (see also Breviary, Easter Time, Tuesday, Week 5).

And when He calls the Father Husbandman, why does He give Him this title, for the Father is not idle or inert in His dealings with us, and while the Son nourishes us and sustains us in a perfect state by the Holy Spirit, the rectification of our condition is as it were the function of the whole sacred and consubstantial Trinity, and the will and power to do all the actions done by It pervades the whole Divine Nature? Therefore, it is glorified by us in its entirety, and in one single aspect. For we call God a Saviour, not gaining the graces which are compassionately bestowed upon us partly from the Father, and partly from the Son Himself or the Holy Spirit, but calling our salvation the work of One Divinity. And if we must

apportion the gifts which are bestowed upon us, or those activities which They display about creation, to each person of the Trinity separately, none the less do we believe that everything proceeds from the Father by the Son in the Spirit. You will think then quite rightly that the Father nourishes us in piety by the Son in the Spirit. He husbands us, that is He watches over us, and cares for us, and deems us worthy of His sustaining providence by the Son in the Spirit.

For this view will be more correct than any other, in my opinion. For if we attribute to each a separate activity in His dealings with us, apart from the others, is it not beyond controversy that since the Son is called a Vine and the Father a Husbandman, we are nourished and sustained in well-being especially by the Son alone, while from the Father we receive merely His providential care. For it is the function of the vine to nourish the branches, and of the tiller of the soil to tend them. And if we think aright, we shall believe that neither the one function, if performed apart from the Father, nor the other apart from the Son or the Holy Ghost, could sustain the whole. For all proceeds from the Father by the Son in the Spirit, as we have said. Very appropriately now the Saviour called the Father a Husbandman, and it is not at all difficult to assign the cause.

For it was to the intent that no one might think that the Only-begotten merely exercised care over us that He represents God the Father as co-operating with Him, calling Himself the *Vine* that quickens His own branches with life and productive power, and the Father *Husbandman*, and for this reason teaching us that providential care over us is a sort of distinct activity of the Divine Substance. For we were bound to know that God did not only make us partakers of His nature, conceived of as belonging to the Holy and consubstantial Trinity, but also He watches over us with the most diligent care, which is illustrated to us very appropriately on this occasion by the figure of husbandry. For when He has before spoken of the vine and its branches, how is not the illustration of the husbandman most apt, introducing the One Who takes the care and charge of the whole, that is God.