

## Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany and week of prayer for Christian Unity

John 15:1-17 & 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Today the 6<sup>th</sup> day of prayer for Christian unity falls on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Epiphany as Christ Jesus is revealed to the world.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021 has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme that was chosen, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit", is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Abide in me as I abide in you (v.4) This reminds me of a saying I hear expressed by many mothers say as they face the challenges of bringing up their children. "I am beginning to sound like my mother" that is because you have acquired the traits of our mothers, as you grow older you see them in yourselves, you resemble your mother in your speech, behaviour and actions. In many ways this is how our relationship with Jesus is, when we abide in Him we are graced in Him and are transformed to being the people God made us to be, been made in his image we begin to look more and more like him.

The word abide is used many times in today's reading from John's gospel to re-enforce its importance in what Jesus was saying to his disciples and to the church today, which is only a valid ministry insofar as is empowered by its relationship to Christ.

The sisters of Grandchamp writes, Jesus said to the disciples, “abide in my love” (Jn 15:9). He abides in the love of the Father (Jn 15:10) and desires nothing other than to share this love with us: “I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (Jn 15:15b). Grafted into the vine, which is Jesus himself, the Father becomes our vinedresser who prunes us to make us grow. This describes what happens in prayer. The Father is the centre of our lives, who centres our lives. He prunes us and makes us whole, and whole human beings give glory to the Father.

Abiding in Christ is an inner attitude that takes root in us over time. It demands space to grow. It can be overtaken by the struggle for the necessities of life and it is threatened by the distractions, noise, activity and the challenges of life. How much time do you devote to prayer in your life, perhaps now is the time to include it as part of your daily routine by setting aside a time for prayer and creating a space to do so.

We live in a time that is both troubling and magnificent, an often dangerous time, where we are challenged by pandemics, wars, violence, poverty, racism and climate change. Yet as Christians seeking reconciliation, justice, and peace, we also know the full value of a spiritual life, we have an immense responsibility and must realize it. We must unite and help each other create forces of calmness, refuges of peace, vital centres where the silence of people calls on the creative word of God. It is a question of life and death.

Though we, as Christians, abide in the love of Christ, we also live in a creation that groans as it waits to be set free (cf.

Romans 8). In the world we witness the evils of suffering and conflict. Through solidarity with those who suffer we allow the love of Christ to flow through us. The paschal mystery bears fruit in us when we offer love to our brothers and sisters and nurture hope in the world.

Spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Abiding in Christ, we receive the strength and wisdom to act against structures of injustice and oppression, to fully recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters in humanity, and to be creators of a new way of living, with respect for and communion with all of creation.

The summary of the rule of life that the sisters of Grandchamp recite together each morning begins with the words, “pray and work that God may reign”. Prayer and everyday life are not two separate realities but are meant to be united. All that we experience is meant to become an encounter with God. And no time like the present when our prayers are needed to God, to call all Christians to join together in prayer for the world to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for healing, mercy and peace. Amen.