**THOSE WHO ARE UNITED TO CHRIST BOTH IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD, ESPECIALLY BY BEING A PART OF A LOVING AND CARING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, FIND TRUE JOY AND BEAR MUCH FRUIT.**

A poor Catechist who lived in a humble house in a small village, carved over his doorway this proud inscription: “Saints Paul, Peter and Augustine live here!" That Catechist had learned that the secret of a rich life lies in one's spiritual companionship. Jesus wants his followers to be united with him like the branches to a tree and to enjoy continually his spiritual company. "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5), he says. In so far as we abide in him and he in us, we will bear much fruit, because he is the source of life and in so far as we do not, we will be absolutely ineffective, because without him we can do nothing. We are called to be united to Christ to the extent that each of us must be able to say with St Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." If a poor Catechist can say that Saints Paul, Peter and Augustine live with him, why can't Christians say that Christ lives in us and we in Christ?

The conditions to live united to Christ are clear. We live in him, by keeping God's word continually in our mind and making it the guide of our actions; by maintaining a prayer life; by receiving the sacraments that draw out his grace; by avoiding all sins and yielding to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Above all, we abide in Christ by being united with one another as a community of love. There can be no such thing as a lonely Christian in a loving community. Our love for one another has to be real. In a real community the good of one will be the good of all and the pain of one will be the pain of all. We are to be grapes not simply to hang around the vine but fruits from which people can eat and drink. We are called to be the fruit and drink especially of the lonely, the ill, the poor and the dispossessed in our neighbourhood and communities. We are meant to be sources of nourishment that revive the spirits, feed the hopes and enliven the bodies of others. What is required of us is not just seeking Christ but abiding in him. In moments of great financial need, we may cry out to Jesus to deliver us; in times of great illness, we may beg him for a cure; that is all right. But we have to be with Christ also at other times. If we get angry with God when a trusted friend betrays a confidence, if we are incensed with him when a dishonest person succeeds where we have failed, if we are bitter with God when a loved one dies, that means we are not abiding in Christ. The pains of life are not signs of being abandoned by Christ; on the contrary they are indications of the opposite. Because we are united to Christ like branches, God will prune us to promote growth of the branches. He will discipline us to strengthen our character and faith. Hence pains of life need not frighten us away from Christ.

If we remain in Christ both in good times and bad, we will enjoy much peace and consolation, as the members of the early Church did: "The Church was at peace and enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31), If we remain in Christ, we will find joy in him, not the superficial joy of prosperity suggested by slick television commercials, but a joy that comes from the fulfilment of one's potential, a joy that will produce much fruits such as curbing violence and bringing back peace in our streets and removing injustices and establishing equality and a Joy that is a power with which we can do all things good for God and the world.