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"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing."
(John 15:5)

Imagine a branch cut off from the vine. It has no future, no hope; it is unproductive and there is nothing for it to do but dry up and be burned. Think of the spiritual death we are destined for as Christians if we do not stay united to Christ. It is a frightening thought! It is complete sterility — even if we work hard from morning till night, even if we think we are doing good things for humanity, even if our friends applaud us, even if our earthly goods increase, even if we make considerable sacrifices. All this may mean something to us here on earth, but it has no meaning for Christ and for eternity, and that is the life that really matters. How can we remain in Christ and Christ remain in us? How can we be green and vigorous branches that are fully united to the vine? We should, first of all, believe in Christ. But that is not enough. Our faith should influence how we live our lives. We should, in other words, live in conformity with this faith by putting the words of Jesus into practice. Thus we cannot neglect the divine means (such as the sacraments) that Christ has left us, the means that make it possible for us to reach unity with him, and to regain it if we have lost it. Moreover, Christ will not feel that we are solidly united to him unless we make the effort to be part of our ecclesial community, our local church. "Whoever remains in me and I in him ..." Do you see how Jesus speaks not only of our unity with him but also of his unity with us? If you are united to him, he is in you. He is present in the innermost part of your heart. And from this comes a rapport, a dialogue of mutual love, a relationship of cooperation between Jesus and you, his disciple. And this is the result: you will bear much fruit, just as the branch that is solidly united to the vine bears grapes in abundance. "...will bear much fruit" means that your life will be a fruitful witness to others. You will be blessed with the ability to open the eyes of many to the unique, revolutionary words of Christ, and to give them the strength to follow these words. It also means that in accordance with the gifts God has given you, you will be able to foster and even initiate projects to alleviate some of the sufferings of humanity. "...will bear much fruit" means fruit in abundance, and this could mean that you will be able to create among those around you an atmosphere of goodness, of mutual love, of true communion. But to "bear much fruit" does not only mean the spiritual and material well-being of others, but your own as well. Your spiritual growth, as well as your personal sanctification depend on your being united to Christ. Sanctification? Perhaps, in these times of ours, to speak of sanctification may seem anachronistic, pointless, utopian. But it is not. These present times will pass and, with them, all such short-sighted and erroneous views. What will remain is the truth. Two thousand years ago, Paul the Apostle said clearly that sanctification is God's will for all Christians. Teresa of Avila, a doctor of the Church, was certain that everyone can reach the highest contemplation. And the Second Vatican Council declared that all the faithful are called to holiness. These are reliable voices. Work then so that you, too, may gather the "fruit" of holiness that you can do only if you are united to Christ. Have you noticed how Jesus is not concerned with the fruit directly, but looks at it only as a result of our remaining united to him? It might be that some fall into the error of many Christians who believe only in activism and more activism, projects and more projects for the good of others, without taking the time to ask

themselves whether they are fully united to Christ. This is a mistake. They think they are bearing fruit, but it is far less than what Christ in them and with them could bear. If we want to bear fruit that will last and that will have the mark of something divine, we must remain united to Christ; and the more we remain united to Christ, the more fruit we will bear. The very verb “remains” used in this sentence gives you an idea that this bearing fruit, is not a momentary but rather a permanent condition. If you know people who live this way, you will see, in fact, how even a smile, a word, a simple everyday gesture, an attitude in a given situation enables them to touch other people’s hearts even to the point of leading them back to God. This is the way it was with the saints. But even if we are not saints, we should not get discouraged. All Christians are capable of bearing fruit. Let me tell you a story. You know that students today can be so highly politicized that little room is left for those who would like to be useful to humanity, but for other reasons. It happened that way in Portugal. Maria do Socorro had just started college in a very tense environment. Many of the other students were involved in political disputes, each according to his or her own ideology, each trying to win over the students who had not joined any group yet. Maria knew what she wanted to do, even though it was not easy to explain her whole strategy to her friends. She wanted to follow Christ and to remain united to him. Her companions, however, who knew nothing of her ideas, labeled her wishy-washy, a girl without ideals. At times she felt awkward when they saw her go to church, but she went just the same because she felt she had to remain united to Jesus. As Christmas approached, Maria learned that some of the students could not go home because they lived too far away. She suggested that the other students get together and give them presents. To her great surprise all the students agreed right away. Later, when there were school elections, another big surprise awaited her: she was elected as representative of her class. Her amazement was even greater, however, when her friends told her that it was only logical that she should have been elected, since she was the only one who followed a precise line of conduct. “You know what you want,” they said, “and how to go about accomplishing it.” Now some of them want to find out more about the ideal of her life and to live it with her. This is the fruit of Maria do Socorro’s perseverance in remaining united to Jesus.

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