

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 9, 2021

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Many of you have had the experience of touring a vineyard. And you wind up the tour in the wine shop! This is no accident. The vineyard doesn't make any money on the tour. On our way to Michigan in the 1990s we stopped in the Niagara escarpment in Ontario. That is one of those geographical areas where soil and climate conditions are just right for growing grapes. But you wouldn't think so in late summer, when none of the vines looked healthy. They were all scraggly, gnarled, and quite stark in appearance. They were trussed up with wire and laden with clusters of grapes in such a way they took on the shape of a man hanging on a cross. Next time you see a grapevine in late summer, remember that suggestion, and see if you agree.

A grapevine is nearly impossible to kill. In fact, being pruned back and having non-bearing branches cut off, combined with the harsh and hot growing season after spring rains, it produces the very intense concentration of grape juice a good vintner knows ferments into first-class wine.

In Saint John's Gospel chapter fifteen Our Lord Jesus says in effect: "*I am like that*. I am the vine that appeared to be dead, but springs forth to cover the earth. And you disciples are *part of that growth*. By being connected to the vine, you have the sustaining power of its life in you." So when you and I ask for things "In His Name" we are not invoking some magic words we found in an old recipe book! The Lord Jesus sets the context of our asking within His teaching about the vine and the branches. We do our asking *as part of the vine*.

A branch cannot ask for anything not according to the will of the whole plant. In the same way, we who are branches of the vine that is Christ Jesus, ask for things according to His will, which is according to what Jesus wants to give us.

Much of the time we do the very opposite. Then we are surprised or hurt by the answers (or what seem to be non-answers) to our prayers. We approach the Lord in prayer as if we were trying to change His mind or get Him to do something He doesn't want to do! This is not being part of the vine. Rather, we are to ask for what He already desires to give us, and the bestowal of which will bind us more closely to Him.

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This reveals the Lord's loving kindness. If what we ask for in prayer does *not* bring us closer to Jesus, His answer will still be some way which does not harm that relationship. If a branch were to ask for things contrary to the life of the vine, the branch (or perhaps even the whole vine) would die. In the same way it is possible for us pray for things that actually separate us from Christ.

Real prayer has cognizance it is asking *from within the life* of *Christ*. His love holds all things together. That is why it has been said, "The petitions of a true disciple are echoes of Christ's words." The blessed Lord said: "Abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." *And that is His only offer.*