



I AM THE VINE

CHRIST THE VINE, A MEDITATION

by

Warren Bieber

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." John 15. 5.

I wonder if you have ever thought seriously about the significance of the words, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The beauty of the fall season is fast waning. Everywhere has been displayed the magnificence of trees with their leaves of many colors. It is quite evident that the branches on which those leaves were hanging were being nourished from a central source. We might very well make an analogy here, substituting Christ as the central source of life and us as the branches. It is more than likely that you have considered this analogy before, but have you thought seriously of the meaning of our union with Christ and its importance for our lives?

From our very birth Christ has been in union with us and we with Him. He has been the sole source of our spiritual life. It was baptism that first brought about this union. Our sponsors made the promise that they would strive to develop this union between us and Christ and make it meaningful for our lives. As we grew older and began developing our own spiritual contacts, our lives were brought into closer union with Christ. We were learning how to choose the right type of friends and to help our neighbors when a need arose. At this time (if at any time) our parents exerted their influence upon us. They sacrificed time and time again, that our lives might be molded in the right manner.

As we think back to our childhood days we realize that even at that time Christ was in contact with us, working through the Holy Spirit, helping us to overcome the various difficulties that confronted us. Whether we took advantage of this Father-child relationship is for each of us to decide for himself.

Having been brought into union with Christ through baptism, we may say in the words of Saint Paul, that we "have put on Christ." But we made an even greater attempt to come closer to Christ when we took our vow of confirmation, for at that time we should have been aware of what we were doing and saying, and have realized that we had now become active members of the church. Having been brought closer to Christ it was of even greater necessity that our lives exemplify our name "Christian." Instead, some of us suffered from a feeling of dejection following confirmation because of the gradual disappearance of many members of our class. Instead of considering this service as a dedication to a closer union with God, many considered it rather as a graduation from Him.

After being received into the Church through confirmation, we were given the privilege of partaking of the Sacrament of the Altar, which

we had learned in our Catechism "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given unto us Christians to eat and to drink, as it was instituted by Christ Himself." Perhaps no one thing brings us into closer union with Christ than Holy Communion. The great mystery that it is, I believe brings us nearer to Christ each time we partake of it, if we come with the right kind of attitude.

Having spoken of three ways in which our union with Christ is made possible --Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion-- I wish to add one more means by which our union with Christ becomes even more real. I refer to prayer. Our earliest contacts with prayer were probably under the guidance of our parents. They taught us the Lord's Prayer, prayers for meal time, and prayers used before going to bed. We probably acquainted ourselves with other prayers learned in Sunday School and perhaps in church. When we were old enough to go to Luther League we may have been called upon to offer an extemporaneous prayer. If we are developing correctly along spiritual lines we should be receiving more and more help from our daily prayers as the years pass.

But it must ever be kept in mind that in order to strengthen our union with Christ through prayer, we must listen to him for a reply to our requests. It is not only a one way conversation. We cannot do all the talking. Although the answer may not be just as we would like it, nevertheless, we can count upon its being for our betterment.

You may be curious to know why I have reviewed the cycle of events that take place in the average Christian's life. I have done so for this reason: I wanted to prove that like as the tree or vine sends forth vitality into every branch, causing it to blossom; so Christ, our Vine, gives us vitality through baptism, confirmation, Holy Communion, and prayer. In our Lord's analogy of the vine and the branches he shows us how close must be our union with him. In this figure we discover the only means by which we can manifest his salvation --loving submission which recognizes him as the source of Christian life.

But here is where we have fallen down. We have not manifested either before God or before our neighbors that we have become dependent on him, his servants, and live with the Christ as closely as the leaves live on the tree. On our own Seminary grounds the attitudes and habits of many men have often fallen far short of being in conformity with Christ's wish. I need not list our failures; you know them as well as I. We must sense that all of our actions must of necessity point toward Christ; otherwise, we are not of him. Our language, our manner, our attitudes toward fellow seminarians, our dealings with our fellow men in general --all must convey only one idea, the centrality of Christ in our lives.

The true love flowing out of our union with Christ must permeate our lives completely. If we can establish a consciousness for this need, we can be sure that wherever we go we will in a small measure at least be able to show that we are Christians, and are reaping the fruits gained through the strength and vitality of Christ.

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(Entered The Philadelphia Seminary, November 1, 1945)

- Borger, Carl Alton, 434 Lafayette Avenue, Palmerton, Pennsylvania. A. B., Muhlenberg College, 1946. Pastor, the Reverend Roland Bortz.
- Dell'Osso, Bernardino Luther, 127 1/2 Fifty-first Street, Brooklyn, New York. A. B., Wagner College, 1945. Pastor, the Reverend Cosimo Dominano Dell'Osso.
- Eisenhart, Henry Elmer, R. D. # 4, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Ph. B., Muhlenberg College, 1942. Pastor, the Reverend Daniel D. Kistler.
- Fuhlbruck, William Richard, Jr., 21 Lanquette Street, Meriden, Connecticut. A. B., Wagner College, 1945. Pastor, the Reverend G. A. Hagerdorne.
- Gartner, Charles, Philson, 2939 Brownsville Road, Pittsburgh 10, Pennsylvania. A. B., University of Pittsburgh, 1941. Pastor, the Reverend Fred O Schuh (ALC).
- Hammer, Theodore Emanuel, 307 Vanderbilt Avenue, Brooklyn 5, New York. A. B., Bucknell (Temple University, University of Pennsylvania), 1942. Pastor, the Reverend Dr. R. Hershey.
- Kiefer, Robert William, 380 Academy Street, Archbald, Pennsylvania. A. B. Muhlenberg College, 1945. Pastor, the Reverend E. O. Staigerwalt.
- Kortrey, Walter Alfred, 112 Fifty-second Street, West New York, New Jersey. A. B., Wagner College, 1945. Pastor, the Reverend George Tenke, Sr.
- Madcira, David Lehman, 101 East Duval Street, Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. B. S., Wheaton College, 1944. Pastor, the Reverend O. V. Anderson.
- May, Kenneth Ray, 715 Penn Avenue, New Brighton, Pennsylvania. B. S. in Economics, Theil College, 1945. Pastor, the Reverend William Harburger.
- Wilson, Luther Hess, Zion Hill, Pennsylvania. A. B., Muhlenberg College, 1946. Pastor, the Reverend Henry M. Kistler.
- Yonts, Martin Luther, Thomasville, North Carolina. A. B., Lenoir Rhyne, 1946. Pastor, the Reverend C. R. Patterson.
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