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Father Cantalamessa on Pruning

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on This Sunday's Gospel

ROME, MAY 12, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the Pontifical Household, on this Sunday's Gospel reading.

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Fifth Sunday of Easter
(John 15:1-8)

He Prunes Every Branch that Bears Fruit

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit" (John 15:1-2).

In his teaching, Jesus often begins with things that are familiar to those listening to him, things that everyone could see. This time he speaks to us with the image of the vine and the branches.

Jesus sets forth two situations. The first is negative: The branch is dry, it bears no fruit, and so it is cut off and thrown away. The second is positive: The branch is living and healthy, and so it is pruned.

This contrast already tells us that pruning is not a hostile act to the branch. The vinedresser expects much from it; he knows it can bear fruit; he has confidence in it. The same happens on the spiritual plane. God intervenes in our lives with the cross. It does not mean he is irritated with us but, in fact, the opposite.

But, why does the vinedresser prune the branch and make the vine "weep," as is usually said. For a very simple reason: If it is not pruned, the strength of the vine is wasted; it will bear perhaps more bunches than it should, with the consequence that not all will ripen and that the rating of the wine will be lower. If it remains a long time without being pruned, the vine even becomes wild and produces only vine tendrils and wild grapes.

The same happens in our lives. To live is to choose, and to choose is to deny oneself. The person who wants to do too many things in life, or cultivates innumerable interests and hobbies, is dispersed, and will not be outstanding in anything.

One must have the courage to make choices, to put some secondary interests to one side to concentrate on the primary. To prune!

This is even truer in the spiritual life. Holiness is like a sculpture. Leonardo da Vinci defined sculpture as "the art of removing." The other arts consist in adding something: color to the canvas in painting, stone on stone in architecture, note after note in music.

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Only sculpture consists of removing, of taking away the pieces of marble that are in excess, so that the figure can emerge that one has in mind. Christian perfection is also obtained like this, by removing and making useless pieces fall off, namely, desires, ambitions, projects, carnal tendencies that disperse us and do not let us finish anything.

One day, Michelangelo walking through a garden in Florence saw a block of marble in a corner protruding from the earth, half covered by grass and mud.

He stopped suddenly, as if he had seen someone, and turning to friends, who were with him, exclaimed: "An angel is imprisoned in that marble; I must get him out." And, armed with a chisel, he began to work on that block until the figure of a beautiful angel emerged.

God also looks at us and sees us this way: as shapeless blocks of stone. He then says to himself: "Therein is hidden a new and beautiful creature that waits to come out to the light; more than that, the image of my own son Jesus Christ is hidden there, I want to bring it out!" We are predestined to "be conformed to the image of his son" (Romans 8:29).

Then, what does He do? He takes the chisel, which is the cross, and begins to work on us. He takes the pruning shears, and begins to prune us.

We must not worry ourselves thinking of what terrible crosses he may send us! Normally, he does not add anything to what life presents us in terms of suffering, effort, tribulations. He makes all these things serve for our purification. He helps us to not waste them.

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