



Act 9:26-31
1 Jn 3:18-24
Jn 15:1-8

Life is like a soccer ball. When it is inflated to the right proportion, it is powerful, effective, and can fly high and fast. If the ball is overinflated or underinflated, it doesn't work so well—it becomes too fast or too slow, too hard or too soft. Similarly, our lives too should be proportionate and well balanced to be effective and to produce maximum fruits. Attention must be paid to balance our life in all ways—physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. How can we be well balanced and proportionate physically? Proper diet and exercise are the keys.

When I first came to this country, I realized that the food here was very different from what I was used to in India—lots of cheese, butter, bread, desert, and a lot of sweet stuff. All these tasted very good to me. I had a sweet tooth as well. I loved cookies—the chocolate chip ones. I remember the first time I went to Costco, I found them. I bought a box and finished up the entire box in three days. As a result of all this, I went from 165 pounds to 195 pounds in about two years. In two years' time, I realized that things were not balanced in me. So I went to see my doctor for the first time—just a regular checkup, and she ordered a bunch of tests.

The results came back, and things were not where they needed to be. I asked her, "What shall I do?" She said: diet and exercise. That got me back to my physical balance.

In the same way, we have to find our balance spiritually, as well. To attain that, we have to have a spiritual diet and exercises—such as prayer, meditation, reading the Word of God, spiritual books, Confession, Mass, and the list can go on. Instead of watching all that junk on television, watch EWTN for at least an hour a day or log onto Formed.org. Make that a part of your spiritual diet.

James Cash Penny, the founder of the JC Penny stores, had a midlife crisis. He left God when he became rich and famous. One day, he was down with "shingles," and he couldn't sleep. He thought he was going to die. He wrote a note to his wife and son, thinking he wouldn't see them the next morning. But, he was surprised to find himself awake the next day. Though he was in a lot of pain, he went to the nearby church. The 20 minutes he spent there changed him and helped him to find that balance in his spiritual life that

he'd lost. After 20 minutes, he said, "I felt the power of God as I had never felt it before. I realized I was responsible for all my troubles. I knew that God, with his love, was there to help me." We, too, need to spend time with the Lord. We need to remain with him.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the vine. You are the branches. Remain in Me as I remain in you. Without Me you can do nothing." Jesus is the vine, the Father is the vine dresser, and the disciples or God's people are the branches. Jesus talks of two types of branches: the fruitless and the fruitful. The **fruitless** are those who do not bear fruits. Two things happen to them: they are cut off from the vine who is Christ, and they are burned in fire. If you are one of his disciples and do not obey his words/commandments, you will not bear fruits. Then the Father, the vine dresser, will do to you what any vine dresser will do to any vine. If after winter you notice some dead branches, you know they will not bear fruit, and so you will cut them off.

The **fruitful** branches are pruned to bear more fruits. Pruning is painful but it leads to more fruits. Think of the times God has pruned you to bear more fruits. The fruitful branch abides in the vine. Jesus teaches us of the importance of remaining in him. This is Christian discipleship. This is the basic requirement for any kind of apostolic or evangelization work: abiding in Christ. "Unless you abide in me you can do nothing." This is true of anyone involved in any kind of work in the Church. Jesus didn't say, "Apart from me, you can do something." He is speaking of the spreading of God's kingdom. He is speaking of evangelization. How can we evangelize without him? Without him, how can we spread his kingdom?

How can we abide in him and bear fruits? The first aspect of abiding in him is to keep his word, and let his word remain in us. "If you remain in me, my words remain in you." We have to let his word prune us and purify us. Therefore, reading the Word and reflecting upon his words will help us remain in him and bear fruits.

St. John tells us in the second reading. "Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them." And Jesus also said, "Abide in me, and I will abide in you." What better way to abide in him than to receive him, receive his body and blood? This is participation in the sacramental life. So, without his Word and the Sacraments, we cannot abide in him and bear fruits. Where do we get the Sacraments? We get them in the Church. So, if we separate ourselves from the Church, we separate ourselves from the sacramental life, and we do not abide in him, and we do not bear fruits. We separate ourselves from Christ by separating ourselves from the Church and by a mortal sin. What will happen then? We will bear no fruits, and we will dry up. What will the vine dresser do to those branches? He will cut them off, and throw them into the fire.

Jesus is the source of our energy. Jesus comes to us to remain in us through the Eucharist. Let us remain in him, and draw our strength from him by following his commandments and abiding in his word.