

Abiding in Christ – The Fruit of Communion

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18-25

“Abide in my love... and you shall bear much fruit” (cf. Jn 15.5-9) is the theme for the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Week has been part of the church calendar since 1896 when Pope Leo XIII set it as a perpetual observance. Actually an octave from January 18 to 25, the Week is just one form of spiritual ecumenism that is the heart of the ecumenical movement. Other forms of spiritual ecumenism include personal prayer, retreats and pilgrimages. Each has a focus on Christ’s prayer “that all may be one” (Jn 17.21).

This year’s Week of Prayer theme was developed by the Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. This ecumenical monastery was founded in the 1940s as Catholic and Reformed women gathered to nourish their life of faith inspired by the example of

Christ who went to be alone to pray. Though Grandchamp is independent of the better-known men’s community at Taizé, these two ecumenical monasteries, geographically close to one another, have chosen the same charism of prayer, reconciliation, and unity in the church and the human family.

The sisters of Grandchamp invite us this year to pray and reflect on John 15, where Jesus proclaims that he is the true vine and his Father is the vinegrower. He calls us to “abide” in him so as to bear fruit. Those who do not, will wither and die. We are to keep his commandments and abide in his love. The sisters explain that, as we are grafted into the vine, which is Christ himself, the Father becomes our vinedresser who prunes us to make us grow. This is what happens in prayer, as

the Father centres our lives, prunes us, and makes us whole so that we may give glory to the Father. To abide in Christ is an inner attitude that demands much of us. When we allow Jesus' words to abide in us, his life flows through us, and we bear fruit.

Recalling a sixth-century devotional text by Dorotheus of Gaza, the sisters of Grandchamp describe a circle drawn on the ground. In the centre is God with spokes radiating outwards towards the circumference, which is the world. The spokes are the different paths or ways that people live. As the saints move closer to God along their own paths, they also move closer to one another. The closer to one another, the closer we come to God. When we turn away from God, we move away from each other. Communion with Christ demands communion with others.

Divisions among Christians are a scandal because moving

away from each other is also moving further away from God. We are called to pray fervently to God for the restoration of the unity for which Jesus prayed. Efforts at reconciliation are costly and demand sacrifice but we are sustained by the prayer of Christ, who desires that we might be one.

The materials for the Week of Prayer include a journey of prayer over eight days. Scripture texts are provided for each day, along with a short reflection and prayer. An ecumenical prayer service and an introduction to the Community of Grandchamp are also included. The resources are jointly published by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. In Canada, these and supplemental resources are available at <http://weekofprayer.ca> in both English and French.

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