

O'Hara Seniors – May 5, 2010

Pet lovers sometimes ask me why I don't have a dog. I tell them I'm not responsible enough. I like petting dogs, but I could never take care of one. I can't even take care of plants. I kill plants. I don't mean to. But if I'm responsible for one, I give it too much water, not enough water, too little light or something. It won't live. Plants tremble in fear when I get close. Plant lovers sometimes ask me why I don't have a garden. It's simple. A garden is too much work. It looks like it's fun and relaxing, and you get to eat home-grown vegetables that are truly awesome right off the plant. But I can't do it. Besides, when you're a priest, people do nice things for you, and you get into the habit of waiting around for the next nice thing to happen. During the summer, if I wait long enough, somebody's going to show up at my house with fresh tomatoes, radishes, asparagus, or zucchini. You normally don't have to lock your car door in Cameron, Missouri, where I live, but during the summer you do because if you don't, somebody will open the door and fill your car with zucchini.

I know this is hard to imagine, but there comes a time in life when being responsible and doing work actually feels good. It's always nice to have people do work for you, and it's always great to have fun. But people eventually want something more out of life. They want to use their skills to benefit others. So, some people go into service professions – medicine, the military, religious life or some kind of career completely devoted to helping others. But even those who labor in offices or at home find the work more enjoyable if it uses their unique skills and makes the world a better place.

At the end of his life, Jesus realized his disciples would want that as well. At the Last Supper, he talked to them about a number of things. One of them was gardening. He knew that they would want to contribute something to the world, to bear fruit as plants do when they are properly tended by someone who does not kill them. "I am the vine, you are the branches," Jesus says. "Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me."

Those who are totally disconnected are good for nothing but to be cut off. Those who do want to bear fruit will be pruned. God gets out these shearers whether you are good or bad. Everybody has to endure pain; that's part of life. Jesus said that his disciples were already pruned because of his word. His word challenged them, but they were already forming their lives around it. Following the word of Jesus was painful, but it would bear fruit.

Today you may be thinking about your future, or about the accomplishments you've made and the pains you have suffered. God has trimmed you and pruned you through suffering so that you might bear fruit. The end of a school year is a great time to laugh and rejoice at the accomplishments of the past nine months. But most people discover that the best joy is the one you experience whenever you serve other people, giving of yourself so that others may

have life. If you stay connected to Christ the vine through meditating on his word and doing service in his name, you will bear much fruit and have much joy.