August 11th: Memorial of Saint Clare, Virgin

Gospel text (*Jn* 15:4-10): Jesus said to his disciples: «Live in me as I live in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself but has to remain part of the vine; so neither can you if you don't remain in me. I am the vine and you are the branches. As long as you remain in me and I in you, you bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not remain in me is thrown away as they do with branches and they wither. Then they are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned.

»If you remain in me and my words in you, you may ask whatever you want and it will be given to you. My Father is glorified when you bear much fruit: it is then that you become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love. You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love ».

«I am the vine; you are the branches»

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Today, day of St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253), we listen at a fragment of John's Gospel in the context of the Last Supper, when Jesus, bidding farewell to His loved ones, about to leave, points out a new way of being attached to Him. He is physically leaving, but we can remain with Him mystically and sacramentally.

In such a short fragment, the recurrence of the expression "remain in" (or "stay in" and "abide in", according to the different versions), amazes us. He does not say "with", but "in". It is not to keep company with, but to keep a deep intimacy, a communion of life with Jesus, as it happens with the vine and the branches.

Pope Francis said, commenting on this same fragment: «Jesus is the Vine, and through Him - like the sap in the tree, the very Love of God, the Holy Spirit, passes to the branches». We receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit when "we are in" or "we remain in" Him.

This is the concentrated synopsis of St. Clare's life: "to remain in" God, expressed in the union between the branches and vines, is described by Clara in her fourth letter to St. Agnes of Prague, where she explains how she herself lives this union: «His affection moves, His contemplation invigorates, His

generosity fills, His sweetness replenishes, His remembrance pleasantly brings light, His fragrance will revive the dead and His glorious vision will bless all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem».

The Gospel suggests an ascent up to the very heart of life in God: "to remain in" starts by being a company, presence, interiority; then becomes a movement of love, Agape, satiety, communion; and it ends in the fruit shared: the fruit belongs to the vine, but it manifests, grows and mature in the branches.

Everything points out to the perseverance in this exchange of life: "Now remain in" (Jn 15:9) my love.