Lesson 11 – The Holy Spirit’s Work….To Bear Fruit

Questions:

1. How can we learn from the Holy Spirit to abide in Christ so that we bear fruit in our lives?
2. What affects our ability to stay close to God and bear spiritual fruit?
3. In what areas of our lives are we damaging our relationship with God and therefore failing to bear fruit?

When Jesus promised that he came so that we might "have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10), he was not speaking simply of living eternally after death. He also was holding forth the promise that we could experience new life—that is, a new quality of life—here and now. Today, God's children can be set free from the enslaving habits of the flesh. God has promised that our lives should be and can be marked by new qualities and characteristics—the result of the supernatural, indwelling, and distinctive work of the Holy Spirit. This session focuses on the Holy Spirit's work in us, the fruit of which is the transformation and reshaping of our character.

The Fruits of the Spirit Are Available to All of Us

Webster's New World Dictionary defines the word "character" as a distinctive work, trait, quality, or attribute, or an individual's pattern of behavior or personality. We may all possess different gifts, but the fruits of the Holy Spirit, expressed as Christian character, are available to all of us. In fact, they should be present in all who abide in Christ. As Pope John Paul II explains:

"Engrafted to the vine and brought to life, the branches are expected to bear fruit. . . . Bearing fruit is an essential demand of life in Christ and life in the Church. The person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: "Each branch of mine that bears no fruit, he (my Father) takes away" (John 15:2).

Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is an indispensable condition for bearing fruit: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). And communion with others is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give: in fact, it is the gift of Christ and His Spirit.”

- Christifideles Laici, 32

Fruit is that part of a flowering plant that contains the seeds. The word "fruit" comes from the Latin word frui, which means "enjoy." When these fruitful qualities and characteristics of the Spirit are in your life, not only do you enjoy life more fully but others more fully enjoy you. Often it is these "Christ in you" qualities that become the seeds of evangelization, springing up as new life in others. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Abiding in Christ: The Key to Bearing Fruit

1. (a) In the first book of the Bible, God instructed Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Beginning with this creation account and continuing throughout the Old and New Testaments, the theme of bearing fruit appears frequently. The prophet Jeremiah used such an analogy to describe two kinds of people and the inevitable consequences they experience as a result of their choices. Take a look at this analogy in Jeremiah 17:5-14. What images does Jeremiah use to describe these two types of people?
(b) According to Jeremiah, what is the key attribute of the person who bears fruit?

(c) "What do the terms "trust in the Lord" and "trust in man" mean to you?

2. (a) In the New Testament, the Gospel of John continues to speak about the importance of bearing fruit and the process of becoming fruitful. Read and reflect on Jesus' statements in John 15:1-16. What do you think Jesus meant by bearing fruit?

(b) Which of Jesus' statements most motivate you to live your life in a way that bears fruit? Why?

(c) Since abiding in Christ is the key to bearing fruit in our lives, practically speaking, what does "abide in Christ" mean to you?

What Affects Our Ability to Bear Fruit?
3. In Galatians 5:16-25, St. Paul wrote about some of the factors that affect our ability to stay close to God and bear spiritual fruit. Desires within us cause a battle to rage between "the spirit" and "the flesh."

(a) What do you think St. Paul meant when he used the word "flesh"? How does this differ from our physical bodies, which are created by God and therefore are good?

(b) What does this passage teach about the influence of the flesh?
(c) ‘What do these verses tell you about the Holy Spirit’s influence?

(d) Explain the difference between living by the flesh and living by the Spirit.

4. In John 12:23-26, Jesus refers to his impending sacrifice on the cross and explains what conditions are necessary to bear fruit in our lives. What truths do you find mentioned here? Describe and explain your emotional response to them.

Facing Those Areas That Prevent Us from Bearing Fruit
5. If we belong to Jesus Christ, according to St. Paul, we have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). Use the following list, found in Galatians 5:19-23, to evaluate whether these works of the flesh are present in any way in your life. Do this evaluation in private, and then discuss whatever you feel comfortable sharing with your group. Make the same evaluation for the fruits of the Spirit. Indicate whether each characteristic is:
   (1) frequently present   (2) occasionally present
   (3) seldom present      (4) never present

The Works of the Flesh
- fornication
- impurity
- licentiousness [unrestrained by law or morality]
- idolatry
- sorcery [witchcraft; in the ancient world, the use of drugs]
- enmities [hatred, hostility]
- strife [bitter conflict or rivalry]
- jealousy
- anger [uncontrolled bursts of temper]
- quarrels
- dissensions [partisan or contentious divisions]
- factions [contentious minority within a larger group]
- envy
- drunkenness
- carousing [drunken revelry]
The Fruits of the Spirit*

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience [long-suffering]
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness [meekness]
- self-control [temperance]
- modesty
- chastity
- generosity

- Take some time in private reflection to be honest with God about what you see in your life. Where necessary, confess your failure to allow the Spirit’s fruit to abide in you In every area where you see sin patterns, repent and turn away from these sins. Take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, knowing that in Jesus’ blood, all your sins are forgiven. Then accept the forgiveness that is assured you through Jesus Christ. Acknowledge the fruit you’ve seen the Holy Spirit work in you, and give thanks and praise to him Write a brief prayer asking God to help you yield to the Holy Spirit’s influence in your life rather than to the flesh.

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush."
—Luke 6:43-44

6. Jesus talks about storing up treasures in our heart that will produce good actions and attitudes. What are some practical ways we can store good things in our hearts?

7. What basic truths about bearing fruit did you discover in this session?

When we consciously decide to turn away from the works of the flesh, we can choose to live according to the Spirit. Over the coming weeks, we will look at some specific ways that the Spirit wants to form our character so that we more clearly reflect Jesus’ image in the world around us. Future sessions will enable us to delve more deeply into each of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
5 Thus says the LORD:
Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings,
who makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.
6 He is like a barren bush in the wasteland
that enjoys no change of season,
But stands in lava beds in the wilderness,
a land, salty and uninhabited.
7 Blessed are those who trust in the LORD;
the LORD will be their trust.
8 They are like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
It does not fear heat when it comes,
its leaves stay green;
In the year of drought it shows no distress,
but still produces fruit.
9 More tortuous than anything is the human heart,
beyond remedy; who can understand it?
10 I, the LORD, explore the mind
and test the heart,
Giving to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their deeds.
11 A partridge that broods but does not hatch
are those who acquire wealth unjustly:
In midlife it will desert them;
in the end they are only fools.
The Source of Life
12 A throne of glory, exalted from the beginning,
such is our holy place.
13 O Hope of Israel, LORD!
all who forsake you shall be put to shame;
The rebels shall be enrolled in the netherworld;
they have forsaken the LORD, source of living waters.
Prayer for Vengeance
14 Heal me, LORD, that I may be healed;
save me, that I may be saved,
for you are my praise.
The Vine and the Branches.

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.

2 He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.

3 You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

4 Remain in me, as I remain in you. 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.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

6 Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.

8 By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.

13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.
Galatians 5:16-25

16 I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.

17 For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.

18 But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions,

21 occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

24 Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.

26 Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

John 12:23-26

23 Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.

26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.