

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 11 & 12, 2020

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Fertilizing the Soul

As we reflect on these last four months living in the midst of the various levels and phases of “Lockdown” and sheltering at home during the Covid-19 Pandemic — we’ve all reacted in different ways to the phenomenon that has certainly altered “business as usual” in our lives:

- obsessive overstocking of cupboards with toilet paper...,
- more fire-crackers bought and exploded than ever before...,
- etc., etc.

I’m sure there will be many studies attempting to explain the psychological meanings of some of our strange behaviors!

One interesting phenomenon – locally and nationally – is that more folks have gotten into spring gardening and planting than ever before. Many greenhouses were sold out by the middle of May and if you look around our area there’s a bit more color in many of our yards and ... the deer seem happier than ever!

Our Readings from Scripture this weekend bring us outdoors into our gardens and invite us to take a look at the gardens of our souls – our hearts; our inner selves. What shape are they in? How thirsty are we?

I love the imagery in the Reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

“Thus says our God:

*Just as from the heavens, the rain and snow come down
and don’t return there until they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful:
giving seeds to one who sows and
bread to one who eats.*

*So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth:
my word will not return to me void –
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it!”*

Consider the verbs: *to water; to bring forth; to sprout* ... they describe real transformation: *the earth doesn’t stay the same* — It is a true revitalizing.

But in a drought – like we’re experiencing right now – transformation doesn’t happen; the earth hardens: you can pour a bucket of water on the hard ground and it runs right off....

Brothers and sisters, it's the same with our spiritual lives: our souls – our hearts – our inner selves. Transformation — to water, to bring forth, to sprout — *does not happen if we waterproof the top layer of life...* maintaining only the surface. The greater the dryness of the soul and of our hearts – the harder it is for the rain to penetrate the inner layers. We can be completely thirsty and not notice it. Everything seems to flow in our day to day lives, but deep down it does not.

So perhaps a good question to ask ourselves during these summer days – in the midst of the on-going Pandemic is: *What is the state of my soul? Deep down beneath the surface? Are we thirsty? How dried up are our hearts?* Have these months of altered life schedules helped us to get more in touch with the life giving water within? Perhaps we have some feeling that going back to business as usual might not bring forth the Spirit...

Interesting: Archbishop Beaufort of Reims, France wrote that the Pandemic shutdown had shown both the planet and its people the need for a real day of Sunday rest and suggested that France designate one Sunday a month as a “locked-down day.” He said:

“...many have heard the birds again and have been able to observe the arrival of Spring like never before in their lifetime.”

Admitting that it is possibly a “waking dream” – he suggested a monthly real Sunday rest for our people, our cities and the earth.

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The story of The Little Prince, written in the midst of WWII when so many uncertainties weighed on everyone, tells of the pilgrimage the Little Prince undertakes after leaving the planet. One of the figures he meets is a strange merchant:

“‘Good morning,’ says the little prince. ‘Good morning,’ says the merchant. This merchant sold pills that had been invented to quench thirst. If you took one pill a week you would feel no thirst.

‘Why are you selling those?’ asked the Little Prince.

‘Because they save a tremendous amount of time,’ said the Merchant.
‘Experts have calculated that if you take these pills, you’ll save 53 minutes a week!’

‘And what do I do with the 53 minutes?’

‘Anything you like!’

‘As for me,’ said the Little Prince to himself, ‘If I had 53 minutes to spend as I liked, I would take a leisurely walk toward a spring of fresh water.’”

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Our Gospel Story today – also brings us outside into our gardens. Yes, the seeds landing on the path, will be eaten up by the birds; the seeds on the rocky ground, will be scorched by the sun and the seeds sown among thorns, will be choked. But even seeds sown on rich soil need to be tended: watered, weeded, fertilized, de-bugged – or they won't do very well...

Our Parish garden – which is flourishing under the watchful eye of our Sr. Maura and her gardeners – needs a lot of tender, loving care or it won't produce anything. [This year we received a donation of 'mushroom soil,' and were advised to bury a fresh egg under each tomato plant... We'll see how all this turns out... but right now it's flourishing ☺ !!]

So I'd invite us to use our summer gardens – in our yards, neighborhoods and here at our Parish – as another image of the state of our hearts – our souls – our inner selves. They need a lot of tending or they will dry up and become hard.

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For us as Americans, among the greatest dangers sparking neglect of our souls, as our friend Wayne Muller reminds us in his book Sabbath, is the "busy-ness" of our lives... a busy-ness that this Pandemic has interrupted and allowed many of us to see for perhaps the first time. Muller suggests:

"We have lost ... (our) essential rhythm. Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something – anything – is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest, our lives are in danger.

In our drive for success we are seduced by the promises of more: more money, more recognition, more satisfaction, more love, more information, more influence, more possessions, more security. Even when our intentions are noble and our efforts sincere – even when we dedicate our lives to the service of others – the corrosive pressure of frantic over-activity can nonetheless cause suffering in ourselves and others.

A "successful" life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks."

If you still have Muller's book in your bookshelf, you might pull it out – it makes for wonderful summer reading.

Maybe among the things we are learning from this time of “lock-down” is that we don't need – or want – to go “back to business (busy-ness) as usual; but rather seek a “new normal” rooted in the essential rhythm to be observed and experienced in our gardens...

Sisters and brother, these last several months we've been reflecting on the moral crisis in our Nation, focusing on racism and all the “isms” that are seeking to destroy us. We've been reflecting on how we as disciples are called to find our voices and join with other people of good will, to bring about something new in our Country. This could be the significant moment for real change for the better – when a critical mass of people say: “Enough is enough!”

But we're never going to be authentic instruments of God's unconditional love for others – until we tend the garden of our own souls and uproot those thorns that keep us from becoming the people God intends.

*“Let there be peace on earth ~
and let it begin with me!”*

Amen!