

LESSONS FLOWERS CAN TEACH US

Jesus has already told us, “Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies...” And in the case of a flower, the same principle applies. The seed dies; it then germinates in the ground and begins to sprout. Breaking through the top of the soil, the green shoots first appear, and then leaves. Finally, a bud begins to form, and slowly, almost imperceptibly, the bud begins to open. Gradually, little by little, a beautiful flower is revealed. This is a magnificent metaphor for growth in spiritual life and unity in Christ.

But what if we imagined this process in reverse?

Could we imagine a flower, slowly and almost imperceptibly, closing up day by day? The flower would, little by little, cease to be a flower and be just an unopened bud on the plant. Then perhaps the bud itself would reduce in size and disappear. Leaves, too, would be less in number as the stem shrinks in size. This process would be virtually unnoticeable from one day to the next—it would only be in the “big picture,” in retrospect, that what is happening would be seen. The plant itself might continue to regress and hide back in the ground. Finally, the germination would be undone, and the seed would be the simple seed it was before the it was ever planted. It is fruitless and is destined simply to be food for crows.

This is the power of sin.

Slowly, day by day, we can make ourselves either more open to the world or more closed in on ourselves. We can engage in small, seemingly insignificant acts of self-indulgence or of generosity. We can become so closed in on ourselves that we are literally fruitless and have no room within for anyone or anything, not even for God. This is hell.

But at any point in the process, our direction can be reversed. Examination of conscience and choice to grow in Christ can lead us every day to deeper rooting in our Lord, greater fertility in bearing the fruit which is the result of active love, greater opening to living out our lives as God’s people.

When we see others, we see only a “snapshot” of where they happen to be at a given time (and we cannot even be so certain we see this clearly). We cannot possibly know the ultimate direction of their lives and growth—I doubt we can really know our own, for that matter. So we are told never to judge others (Matthew 7:1). But we can formulate in our own hearts, daily, the desire to be Christ’s, to do for Christ what brings glory to God and furthering to the Kingdom. We can choose to be flowers that are in process of opening and blooming. Which is our choice?