

Petunias Growing in Concrete

Recently, as I was walking on Square along the High Street sidewalk next to the St. John's Parish Hall, I noticed a surprising sight. Looking down at the base of two of the lights posts, I discovered that petunias were flowering along the edge of the concrete! Apparently, seeds had either fallen, or more probably, been carried by birds, from the large Rotary hanging baskets of flowers on the light posts overhead. So the petunias in the flower baskets had found their way down to the sidewalk and had somehow germinated in the cracks of the concrete.

Now if I tried to plant petunias between the cracks of the sidewalk, I don't think I would be very successful! But here it was, flowers were somehow growing and blooming. So let me call this "The Petunia Principle"- flowers will sometimes grow and blossom, by God's grace, even in concrete.

I love this metaphor of growth. When we speak of growth we affirm the vitality of all that lives. To have life is to grow. To grow is to be constantly changing, to be dynamic. This growth is mysterious, which is to say that, for us, it is of God. While we often share with God in helping to make things grow, we also recognize that growth is uniquely part of God's gift to us. And we are often surprised by it.

Instead of petunias, I might have begun this reflection by noting how our children grow and change. Isn't it amazing to suddenly become aware of how a child or a teenager has matured, seemingly almost overnight? As I welcome families at the front door of the church at the end of the summer, I often marvel at how sons and daughters suddenly towered over their parents. Such growth is not always easy or even welcomed. But it is a reminder of the wonder of life.

The Bible is full of references and illusions to growth. Many of the parables taught by Jesus had to do with seeds and plants, with lilies of field and birds of the air. These stories typically are affirmations of the dynamic aspect of faith, or what Jesus called, "The Kingdom". They remind us that growth is a gift of God, and a very mysterious and wondrous gift it is!

The signs of growth are at once both obvious and subtle. We can measure some growth empirically: there are more things to count and more challenges that always accompany change. Some growth can only be discerned with a sharp eye or an open heart: new, open faith which is quietly seen in tentative steps forward.

Look around you and you might notice "petunias" growing strongly and persistently. New life is everywhere. Even in the midst of things passing away, there are always signs of new life. Each congregation, each ministry, each encounter has the potential for amazing growth and new life. We need to slow down, open our eyes and our hearts, and not be at all surprised when petunias grow in the concrete.

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