

## Seeds of New Life

It is springtime and planting season. Well almost. If we weren't in Wyoming, we could be certain that late March was springtime. Instead, we waver between winter and spring for the next 4-6 weeks. Yet, we still know that spring is inevitable. Farmers and gardeners are itching to start planting. The new life of spring is just around the corner.

Do you feel the same way about Lent? Lent is an old English word for spring. Lent is a spiritual springtime when God's new life springs forth in us. How is that going for you? Before long, the trees and plants will be budding with leaves and blossoms. It is inevitable and unstoppable. Do you believe that God's new life is inevitable, for you and for the world? Or are you not sure whether God's life will flourish in you this Lent? What do you need to do to experience new life this spring?

For farmers, the hope for new life requires an investment of time and money: seed, fertilizer, fuel, herbicide, and long hours in the fields. The investment involves risk. Will there be a drought? Will a hailstorm ruin the crop? Will the prices at harvest be high enough to make a profit?

Springtime involves enormous risk, not only for farmers, but also for God. Every Lent, we remember the great risk which God takes with us. He bets everything. Like a gambler, he's all in. He sows the most expensive seed. This is how Jesus described his death, ***"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"*** (Jn. 12:24).

Each spring, God plants the seed of his Son in our hearts. God invests in us because he wants us to produce great fruit. But there is a risk involved. Will we respond? Or will there be a drought in our hearts?

The first step to a renewed spiritual life is to marvel at God's love and receive it. Next Sunday we will reflect on the Passion, but this Sunday Jesus already invites us to marvel at the cross. He says, ***"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself"*** (Jn. 12:32).

This is how he views the cross. It is the hour of glory when good conquers evil. It is such a spectacular expression of love that it attracts all people. ***"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."*** Earlier Jesus said, ***"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day"*** (Jn. 6:44). The Father and the Son are always drawing people into relationship to fill them with new life.

Yesterday, I celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation with college students on the Search retreat in Laramie. A few students spoke of a desire to know more about Jesus or God. They feel called to pray, or they desire not just to know about Jesus but to experience his mercy. Those desires are graces. They are more than the thoughts of young people; rather, the Father who sent Jesus is drawing them into a relationship.

The first step to a renewed spiritual life is to marvel at God's grace and receive it. It is to recognize that God takes the initiative to love us. It is similar to how we see the trees and grass spring to new life. We marvel at the miracle of new life. We do not cause it; we simply enjoy it. That is the first thing that Jesus wants of us as he is lifted up on the cross. He wants us to marvel, to be thankful, and to receive his love humbly.

The second step to a renewed spiritual life involves suffering. Jesus calls us to suffer and die with him, that we might produce much fruit. ***"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life"*** (Jn. 12:25). With this saying he described

his own passion and death. But the saying also is a challenge to us. Jesus calls us to share his passion. He invites us to enter into the mystery of his death. To imitate his passion by dying for others. To empty ourselves, so that we will be raised up like him. We are to be seeds of new life for the world. We are to lose our lives for the good of others.

Next Wednesday is the feast day of St. Oscar Romero. He showed us how to lose our lives for the good of others. In 1980 he was martyred in El Salvador. He was killed because he spoke out clearly against the Salvadoran government, which refused to respect the rights of the poor. When people protested, they were killed. Before he was assassinated Oscar Romero had received death threats, and he had a sense that he would be killed.

When a journalist asked him about the threats against his life, he said, “Yes. I’ve been threatened with death many times, but I should say that as a Christian, I don’t believe in death. I believe in resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people. When I say that, I’m not trying to brag. I say it with great humility. I hope they will be convinced that it will be a waste of time. A bishop will die, but the Church of God, which is the people, will never perish.” (p. 396, Oscar Romero: memories in mosaic).

Romero believed that the mystery of Christ was unstoppable, and that the paschal mystery was at work in his own suffering and death. He saw his life within the paradigm of Jesus death and resurrection. He saw his death as a way to give life to others. When we give ourselves for others, it will always end up in new life, for us and for them. Romero said, “As a Christian, I don’t believe in death. I believe in resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people.” Suffering in obedience to God always brings new life.

The same is true for every kind of suffering. If someone has cancer, and they entrust their suffering to God, it can be a path to life for others. When Covid-19 forces us to sacrifice for others, it is a path of life. When a mother or father suffers daily for their children by caring for them, they are dying to self and imitating God’s generous love. They are being seeds like Christ. Later in life, when their children are old enough to appreciate that love, it will inspire them to be selfless like Christ. The seed of Christ continues to multiply through them.

There are eleven days left of Lent. It ends on the eve of Holy Thursday when we begin the Easter Triduum. There is still time to experience a renewal this Lent. Jesus said, “***When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.***” Marvel at the cross. Receive his life as pure gift.

Then, see suffering as a path to new life. “***Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.***” Spring is inevitable. So is the new life of Christ if we respond to his gracious love with faith, if we imitate his selfless sacrifice. God is bringing new life to the world. His grace is unstoppable. Christ invites us to be seeds of new life by forgiving, by loving selflessly, by trusting in suffering. Christians do not believe in death as the last word, but in the resurrection.