



Gardening

A helpful spiritual practice

By Bishop Greg

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One of the most helpful spiritual practices I engage in is called “gardening.” Throughout the years, I have found that working in the garden, sowing seeds, and tending to plants, are nothing less than actions of hope and promise. I might even go so far as to say it is a form of worship, one that perhaps only gardeners fully understand.

There is something about putting one’s hands in the soil, in God’s good earth, that grounds me — literally! I am reminded of my connection to creation. Passages from Genesis 2 readily come to mind, such as when God creates the human ones from the dust of the earth, from clay. I also note how God and I are a bit alike — it is God who plants a garden in Eden. Surely this is a holy and certain calling.

As I garden, the ritual words from the Ash Wednesday liturgy speak so clearly to me: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Weeding is a particularly helpful way to develop one’s prayer life. Kneeling down (what a very appropriate liturgical gesture), I pray as I weed. I think of people I have had conversations with throughout the week. I replay the heavy weight of certain conversations, of unfinished items and of conflict.

There is something sacramental about gardening. The earthly element is rather obvious, but the word? Think of all those times that Jesus speaks of gardening, planting and pruning as being activities of the kin-dom of heaven.

“A sower went out to sow,” with some seed falling here and there, but all of it being sowing generously, graciously, extravagantly. To what shall the kingdom of God be compared? “It is like a mustard seed ... that grew and became a tree.” (Luke 13:18-19)

Hear, too, the passionate, loving, divine forbearance of the gardener: “Sir, leave it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” (Luke 13:8-9)

There’s a sermon to be found out there in the garden. The Sermon on the Mount calls us to a posture of living that is hard for us to practice: “Consider the lilies of the field; how they grow,” said Jesus. Study the calendulas and hellebores, the phlox and verbenas. “They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.” (Matthew 6:28-29)

Gardening also enriches one’s conversation with the birds of the air. If patience is a virtue, then the families of crows and robins living close by are the epitome of patience. For where a gardener is, there are bound to be grubs and worms and other delectables to savour.

Worshipful music fills the air when one gardens. The Kryie is provided by chickadees. Hymns of praise are melliflously sung by white-crowned sparrows. And the red-shafted flicker’s staccato declaration on the neighbour’s chimney vent is a call to worship.