

Along the track

The Eye of the Beholder

A beautiful ornamental tree graces our front garden. I often told its previous owner how much I admired it; he was a neighbour who lived a couple of streets away. He hated it. Over the years, it had been mutilated, abused and made unwelcome.

One day, he dug it up and dumped it in our garden. A good day for him and a good day for us! We welcomed it, planted it, cared for it, watered it, fed it and watched it grow. It took a while, but it is now a thing of rare beauty. People stop to admire it, comment on it, and to photograph it.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder we are told, but like the tree gifted to us, it has to be nurtured. We have to cultivate the attitude, the eyes to see it. All tastes are not the same. Wouldn't the world be boring if we were all the same! Where one person sees ugliness, another sees beauty and sometimes they live side by side. We can find beauty but only if beauty has first been cultivated within. We have to start thinking that way. In Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus say: 'For the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart'. (Matthew 12:34)

So, what fills our heart? What qualities do you look for in people, what draws you to your friends? What do you most admire in them? What do you think you bring to the friendship? Where are you most at peace, where do you find most enjoyment? When you go into your workplace or to a meeting, what attitudes do you bring? Do you bring life and creativity or can you suck the life out of the room? Do you look for the positives, or are you drawn to the negatives?

We are designed to experience 'life to the full', so don't negate its most rewarding possibilities. If we live with cynicism, pessimism, sarcasm and constant negativity, that's probably how we will see our world and we are robbed of life's positives. But if we look at life and ask ourselves, what is here to celebrate? That attitude can create new life, new attitudes and new ways.

Of course, times in life can be difficult. There are hard times and sometimes we are challenged by others. That is not always easy but made more difficult when we have not nurtured our inner selves, our inner call to live life to the full, our inner call to be of service, to bring what happiness and joy we can. Having the capacity to see beauty, to be positive, to be encouraging, to be loving and generous in our attitudes can be a source of growth for ourselves and those we live and work with.

The tree we were given had been badly treated. It is a weeping cherry, and the previous owner hated not being able to get the mower under it, so the weeping branches were pruned, not all that well. It didn't like the change at first, and I thought we would lose it a few times, but with care and attention, it came back to its true nature, to look at its best, to be what it was designed to be.

Sometimes it takes time to be what we are meant to be. It may call us to a change of mind and heart. The world we create in our minds shapes how we live, what we see and how we see it. We have to start thinking the way we want to live. But often we are blind to what holds us back, blind to our attitudes, ready to blame others. As Jesus says, we easily see the speck on our neighbour's eye and miss the plank in our own. If we seek out only those who agree with us, if we are not open to other ideas, other ways, sometimes things that challenge us, we will probably stay the same. As spirituality writer Father Ronald Rolheiser puts it: *We all have certain habits in our lives which we know are bad, but which for a variety of reasons (laziness, addiction, lack of moral strength, fatigue, anger, paranoia, jealousy, or the pressure of family or friends) we are reluctant to break.*

But if we are to grow, to be the person we are meant to be, nurturing the inner life, looking for the beauty and wonder of life is a critical step. After all, that is one of the reasons why God created the world, and as the first book of Genesis says, 'God saw that it was good!' Do we see our world that way and if not, what can we do to make it that way? What did you see today that brought you joy and happiness? Did you leave any of that around?



Regards
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