[Voices of Sisters]
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Sister Lissy’s butterfly pea plant in the convent garden (Lissy Marathanakuzhy)



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There was a period when I spent much of my time within concrete walls, engaged in my mission activities. Rarely did I have the opportunity to let my feet touch dust or mud. When I did, I must say that those were moments of great inspiration, or enriching moments in my life.

Recently one early morning, I allowed myself to visit the little garden adjoining our convent. There was a reason. I had a favorite butterfly pea plant growing there.

I had learned from my parents and grandparents, who walked through our fields in the morning hours, that visiting plants helps them grow better. They too waited for love and affection. "Like little children, they feel happy when we visit them, caress them," my mother told me one day.

Later, I learned that visiting plants nurtures me, too. During a retreat, the director told me, "Get friendly with a tree in the garden. Talk to it as a friend, spend time with it, caressing its leaves, trunk, shoots." In fact, that was a healing process for me.

The butterfly pea plant was in bloom and attracted me. It looked splendid in a pot in the corner of the garden; I had placed it there on purpose so it would be in the sunlight and not disturbed in its growth and expansion.

When I moved the large pot to this location — with some help — I was not sure what the future of this thriving plant would be. Would it fall off in the wind because I did not find a strong support for its expansion?

On this day when I saw it in bloom, I jumped with joy. The bloom looked like a decoration on the plant. I smiled, touched it, arranged its new stems, and stood silently beside it, enjoying its beauty.

I thought of God who waits for surprises from me — surprises of my doing his will, surprises of my walking the way he had marked for me.

> The seeds of faith, love and hope are your strength; they are within you; draw strength from them. The strength within you is the Spirit of God.
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I thought of how he allows me to experience the inconveniences and inclement weathers of life to strengthen me physically, emotionally, spiritually.

The plant before me spoke to me now of many things regarding how God directs our life.

To begin with, I had brought a few seeds from a plant I saw growing in the wild. Being informed of its medical benefits, I decided to plant them in our garden. I spread the seeds in two places. One spot was under a tree. It grew and was extending its tendrils for support when it was plucked out. Of course, it was pulled up by someone who did not recognize its benefits, and who did not know that I had domesticated it!

I was upset, of course.

But I had also planted some of the seeds in a flower pot, which showed no signs of growth even after two months. I knew they were there, under the mud, and I had to keep them safe. I planted a ladyfinger plant, which quickly grew and produced fruit. It was actually protecting the seeds in the pot.

For some reason, I did not visit them for a long time.

One morning, I was surprised to see a pair of two-inch tall plants at the side of the ladyfinger plant.

I was immensely happy of course. The butterfly pea plant was alive and growing. I found a support for its tender creeper stems, and at this point I moved it to the wall to get more support.

It had grown and spread quite a bit, when one day the support system collapsed. But an amazing thing became visible. The creeping stems were supporting themselves

by entwining. They found support within. With the little support I provided, they could now manage. They were establishing themselves well to withstand nature.

And now they were in bloom. "Bloom where you are planted." The saying flashed through my mind.

I felt something within me whispering: Find strength within yourself. You have the ability to discover new ways and means to help yourself and others, to support yourself and expand your mission. The seeds of faith, love and hope are your strength; they are within you; draw strength from them. The strength within you is the Spirit of God.

As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "My words and preaching were not brilliant or clever to win listeners. It was rather a demonstration of spirit and power ... not of human wisdom, but of God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:2-5).

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Anthony Robbins, an American writer, says, "People don't usually lack resources; they lack control over their resources."

Here was a plant proving this.

I recalled the days when I faced inconveniences at various stages of my life: when I resented being moved from my comfortable office or convent, separated physically from friends, left to complete a work all by myself, when I had to find new ways to do my mission outreach.

It was not by chance; it all had a purpose. Purpose to strengthen my will, my heart and my spirit.

There is a saying: "The secret of success is making your vocation a vacation." Doing even cumbersome work with joy makes it enjoyable and brings forth much fruit.

The butterfly pea flower gently nodded in the gentle breeze that caressed the plant. It had no complaint when I moved it from place to place. It continued to grow in the sunlight of God's presence.

Yes, I had received a message from God, through God's tiny creation.

God has a plan in all that happens in my life. How true is what Anton Chekhov says, "Man is what he believes."

God wants me to grow to full stature, in the way he has planned for me, and he clears the way for me. Sends the light step by step. Only when I dare to step ahead, I can see that he walks before me. The way is clear, the lights are shining.

Blessed James Alberione once said, "God does not send all the light at once. He sends light for one step at a time." He said it from experience as he followed the promptings of God to launch into new activities even when physically no resources were in view.

We recently celebrated his 50th heavenly birthday in November, and now I can better understand what he said. He had experienced the light coming from God slowly but steadily. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis when the religious congregations he founded were still developing. He had begun publications and periodicals and found he was almost bankrupt. When he found himself empty-handed, he would lock himself in a room and spent time in close union with God. He trusted on God's assurance: "Do not be afraid, I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10).

In my heart, I am filled with joy. I can see the light as I take baby steps to newness, to challenging situations, to vistas in my mission.

I know I am in the loving presence of my great God. I trust in his promised presence.

He is always showing me new opportunities of growth, new systems of support.

This time he chose the butterfly pea plant.