**Sequoia or bonsai - Fire and the Spirit**

*I heard that crime is on the increase in high rise apartments. That is wrong at so many levels.*

The bizarre qualities of the sequoia inspired some deeper reflections in this writer. There is food for thought for all ages in this gift of nature.

One of the most amazing treasures of nature is the sequoia tree, more commonly known to North Americans as California Redwoods and including the cypress. With seeds the size of a flake of oatmeal the tree grows as tall as a twenty story building.

Further amazing facts: a sequoia can be 100 years old with a trunk the size of a fifty cent piece. Sequoias can be cultivated as bonsai trees. Some that are 2000 years old can grow faster than a young tree. The oldest sequoia known was 3500 years old by the ring count.

A natural enemy to trees, fire is necessary to open the seeds of the sequoia and to clear the forest bed for fresh seedlings. The secret to this tree’s growth is a steady supply of soil and sunshine.

Young or old, we can grow marvelously with the fire of the Spirit in us. A steady supply of spiritual nourishment and the sunshine of Christ’s light can breathe new life into old bones, or cause young growth to spring forth.

Do we want to be like the bonsai? Old in years with little stature? Or do we want to continue to grow in spite of age? The great gardener prunes and nourishes all. It is never too late or too early for growth.

Theresa of the Little Flower was merely fourteen when she joined the Carmelite order. She served God by following her “little way” to holiness. Dying at twenty-four, she left such simple and profound examples for us to follow that she was declared a Saint of the Church and more recently Pope John Paul II declared her a Doctor of the Church.

The little way of St. Therese is simply seeking holiness in the ordinary tasks of everyday living. Theresa had two convictions about being a disciple: one, God gives us His love and mercy and forgiveness, and two, as imperfect beings we should see God as a loving parent with open arms. Fear of God’s judgment often stifles the freedom we should have as children of God.

Theresa saw the seasons of nature reflecting God’s love affair with us. She loved flowers and saw herself as a little flower of Jesus. She gave glory to God by living a simple and holy life, doing little things well and all for the glory of God.

Our lives too can simply follow the growth pattern of the sequoia. Soaking in the sunshine and embracing the soil, we can grow where we are planted. The size we achieve does not matter so much as our willingness to embrace the fire of the Spirit and our ability to flower in new growth of goodness and love.

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