

Reflections

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The palm tree of Port Said

In October 18, 1966 I made my first Consecration in the Schönstatt Fathers' community, in front of our Founder together with many other fellow brothers. At the end, Father gave us a lecture and read a poem: "The palm tree of Port Said," which is an image, a parable of life.

In the role of a gardener, he speaks to us about wisdom, patience, and the goodness of God. But we can apply it perfectly to the mission of priest, of parents, and of every teacher.

"In Port Said exists a palm tree, called a royal palm; it lifts its leaves over the earth, as tall as a tower. A legend is intertwined among its green leaves. Listen now to this story full of profound wisdom.

With hundreds of other palms it grew rapidly in its youth, until in its first spring the gardener planned against it. While the others were growing peacefully, the first fright quickly came upon the tree: with sharp chops the gardener cut off all its new branches.

Spring returned and healed the wounds, new sap ran through his trunk and the royal palm rose upwards with renewed and impetuous energy of life.

With the gardener depriving him year after year, all of his foliage was scorned by the rest. His trunk lacked the crown, the proud head with which to stand out. Thus it went for a whole generation: the palm grew so rapidly and agilely that neither the axe nor the ladder could reach it.

Then the palm spread its branches to form a roof with its leaves, higher than all the rest. The old gardener came and said to him:

'Of all, you were the most loved; and I have only caused you much pain so that in the end you could raise yourself above all the rest.

Only pain pushed you to the heights. Look, your brothers have remained below.'

So then, proudly the royal palm bent over in the afternoon breeze in gratitude. Whispering and singing among its branches, spreading across the lands towards us; like a comfort on dismal days, the palm clamored over the sea.

"You, meek of heart, don't give up. The axe wounds you deeply; spring will heal your wounds, and the sunlight shall shine again.

Even when storms rage around you, don't give up because of your pain: think of the wise gardener and of the palm tree there in Port Said."

What is the message of this poem? I think that it reminds us of the mission of each father, mother, or teacher: "the disinterested service to the life of others." The work of planning, cultivating, caring for, protecting, and accompanying life.

What is teaching? To teach is to love. "Teachers are lovers who never grow tired of living," says Father Kentenich. It is a love that helps one to grow and develop one's self, to be better, to come to completeness. And that love, which we admire in the garden of Port Said, has two fundamental characteristics: it is a demanding love and, because it is challenging, it is a love that lifts up.

Demanding love: a love that motivates itself to cut, to prune, and to cause suffering. It is like God who cleans the branches of the vine, so that more fruit is produced (Jn 15, 2). It is not about demands just for the sake of demanding. It is a demand for love, for trusting in the good reason for the demand. It is a love that challenges, like the palm tree of Port Said. Because in this world there is no progress without sacrifice, there is no maturity without suffering.

In second place, this is a **love that lifts one up**. A love that raises a person, that guides him towards the heights, above the rest of the palm trees. A love that has faith in the other, which stimulates him and awakens the best in him so that he can become what he should be. The love which elevates carries its object towards the stars, awakens the desire and increases the aspiration to the highest sanctity.

Dear brothers, in difficult days, when we feel worn out and without spirit, when we may be tempted to abandon all, I hope that we may remember the wise gardener and the royal palm tree of Port Said.

Questions for Reflection.

1. How do I react when I feel I am being pruned?
2. Do I demand love for my neighbor?
3. Do I have the tendency to become discouraged?