

Column

Adequate rain and cooler-than-normal temperatures this spring have caused lettuce in my raised garden to flourish. The green leaves are tender and ready for harvest. On the other hand, the tomato plants I planted shortly after Easter are a few-weeks off from being ready to pick. The tiny green balls on the vine, however, are enough to conjure up the vision and taste of tomato sandwiches dripping with juice.

Watching a garden grow brings to mind words of the 19th-century Irish hymn writer Cecil Frances Alexander: “The cold wind in the winter, / the pleasant summer sun, / the ripe fruits in the garden, / God made them, ev’ry one.”

And so He did. God and gardens go hand and hand. We dig and plant, but God gives life to tiny seeds and brings forth growth. Growth, if you think about it, is the focus of summer.

The Christian Church, taking her cue from the natural world, likewise provides for a season of growth. After highlighting key events in the life of our Lord in the first half of the Church Year, the focus shifts in the second to applying the truths of the Gospel . . . growth in knowledge and holiness. This season follows Trinity Sunday (June 4 in this year’s calendar) and goes all the way to four weeks before Christmas.

Sundays in this season are reckoned ‘after Trinity’ or in some church traditions ‘after Pentecost’. A still third designation is ‘ordinary time’. Regardless what this season is called, the focus is growth as symbolized by green altar and pulpit hangings often used at this time.

Whether your church formally observes this season or not, what better time than as vegetables are ripening in the garden to pursue your own ‘ripening’ in terms of spiritual maturity? After all, scripture abounds

with such admonitions as the one found in 2 Peter 3:18: “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Pursuing maturity, going from being a baby Christian into a fully formed one, has two distinct benefits. First, we benefit personally. Our understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf is expanded. As a result, our faith is confirmed, our hearts are warmed and our wills strengthened.

But it is not only our personal spirituality that is enhanced. Our ability to speak to those outside the Christian family is increased. When people ask us what we believe and why we have something meaningful to tell them.

Perhaps by now you are convinced growth is good and desirable, but what are some of the things you can do to open the door for the Holy Spirit to bring about this growth?

Here are a few suggestions: Join a Bible study. Read a portion of scripture daily. Pray for three people by name who have not yet come to Christian faith. Take on some hands-on ministry such as distributing food to the needy. Make observing the Lord’s Day a priority even when travelling.

These are just a few suggestions. Come up with some of your own. Let the ripening fruit in the garden be your guide!

O GOD, the strength of all those who put their trust in thee; Mercifully accept our prayers; and because, through the weakness of our mortal nature, we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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