

Story Of The Rose

By: Monsignor Michael A. Campagna.
A passage in his book titled "A Little Love"

One late afternoon, as I was returning from school, I found myself making my way down an alien, alley-like street. In the semi-darkness of the unfamiliar surroundings, I nearly stumbled upon a cracked flower pot, which was lying on the ground. It contained a withered away rose bush filled with dry dirt and dried out red rose blossoms.

Unconsciously, I picked up the pot and fingered through it, my thoughts running fast to the happiness which the now dried blossoms must have brought to someone on some happy occasion - when the plant was new and fresh and alive. In my young imagination, it was impossible to understand how or why someone could have or would have neglected such a thing of beauty to the extent that it had to be tossed out of a window and left to die. Conscious that things like that do occur, I accepted it as I have accepted that people too, often find themselves involved in so many activities, some of them even of questionable value, that they consider unimportant and meaningless such things as flowers.

Since I had always loved flowers, I examined the condition of the neglected rose bush. A small bud, badly bent over itself, was still alive, though not well, indicating that the bush still had a bit of life left. Since it was not completely dried up, I decided to carry home the cracked flower pot and attempt to save its contents. The deciding factor was the discovery of the miserable looking, innocent bud, which hung tenaciously to life. It seemed to be pleading that it, too, had a right to blossom out into the splendor and fragrance of a beautiful rose. Determined to do all possible to help it do just that, I thought that perhaps changing its environment and giving it tender care might make the difference. At home, the cracked container, was thrown away, substituted for a new and larger one. The best earth available was placed in the new container. It was watered and fertilizer was added. In order that it would receive much light and warmth, it was placed in the center of a large window in my room, one facing the south. There was nothing left to do but wait for what hopefully would be the miracle of rehabilitation.

The process, though understandably slow, was most rewarding. The yellowish leaves became more green each day. The drooping little branches gradually straightened themselves out, as they grew in foliage and strength. The withered bud grew in size and beauty until it blossomed into one of the most beautiful roses that I had ever seen, and its penetrating fragrance diffused itself throughout our home.

The almost miraculous blossoming produced by the simple and rational change of environment, good substantial nutrition, light, warmth, and tender care made me very happy and paid off abundantly for every effort put forth. This was an essay Father Campagna wrote at age 16 and was given generous recognition by his professor. For Father Campagna, it contained a prophetic message that was to enrich his life in the years to come.

"One is the idea that boys are like flowers. A flower in a dark alley with no sunlight, with neither moisture nor air, will wither away. However, if it is given care, sunshine, and air, it will grow straight and strong. A boy is the same. Stuff a boy into an alley, and his emotional growth will be stunted. Give him love, care, and a home, and he will grow up right."