

How does your garden grow?

Many people received love cards, candy and flowers for Valentine's Day. I didn't expect any and didn't get any so I was not disappointed. Instead I fell in love with the earth. I decided to turn over a new leaf, or, should I say, turn over a new sod. I didn't do it because it was the day after Ash Wednesday but to fulfill a promise I made to myself on retirement.

So, with spade in hand I began to dig into the soggy earth. The ground yielded to my pressure and determination. Progress was slow but persistent as the moist soil clung to the spade afraid to be turned over in its new grave.

As a kid, growing up on a farm, I knew the labor involved in gardening. I would rather have played hokey than disturb a restful earth. But we had no choice but to do our part to contribute to the family table. Now, it was going to be different. This time, there was no pressure from peers. Instead, there was the hope and expectation of being part of a beautiful creative process.

After a few hours of digging, progress seemed slow and all I had created were some blisters on my hand. Following frequent breaks and many reflective moments, I continued. I remembered that when I was retiring people would ask, "What are you going to do in your retirement? Obviously, not being gifted with a green thumb, I simply replied "gardening." Now, I was following through on my suggested course of action.

A few days later, my newly dug garden was ready for compost. A nearby pile of rotten clippings from my lawn, accumulated over the years, was to provide the raw material. As I dug into the pile of compost, thousands of earth worms greeted me. During the past few years, they had done their job well. Now I transferred them and the compost to continue the good work the Lord had begun in them.

Now, that the pregnant garden awaited the seeds that it would bring to fruition, neighbors would ask, "What are you going to plant? I had thought of planting potatoes, but I didn't want to start another mini famine, so I set my sights on planting some vegetables. Obviously, friends who planted gardens in Mississippi would have their own suggestions. But, given the climate, choices were limited. I defaulted to it being a vegetable garden. Of course, I was given some advice from some seasoned gardeners and took it under consideration..

As I worked the seeds into the waiting ground, my head was filled with the words of an old Irish song called "The Garden Song." Its words still challenge me to remember the life cycles of nature that I was now contributing to:

Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow
All you need is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground
Inch by inch, row by row, someone bless these seed I sow
Someone warm them from below til the rains come tumbling down

Pulling weeds, picking stones, we are made of dreams and bones
Need a place to call my own for the time is near at hand
Grain for grain, sun and rain, find my way thru nature's chain
Tune my body and my brain to the music of the land

Plant your rows straight and long, temper them with prayer and song
Mother earth will make you strong if you give her love and care
As old crow watching hungrily from his perch in yonder tree
In my garden I'm as free as that feathered thief up there!

Now, I have no choice but to trust Mother Nature, who with her Creator and a little help from yours truly, bids me wait patiently for the fruits of my labors to be enjoyed later at the family dinner table.