



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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The lesson of the purple petunia

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on MARCH 25, 2013

I was making retreat at St. Joseph Retreat Center in Cohasset, Massachusetts a few years back. As I walked in the yard that first day, I came upon this:



It was a purple petunia growing in the crack between the asphalt and the concrete. It made me stop. Stooping down to get a better look at it, I found myself saying to the little plant, "What in the world are you doing *here*?" I looked around. Sure enough, there were some petunias growing alongside a building nearby—but they were about 20 feet away! I quickly deduced that some of the seeds from those plants were carried here—perhaps by the wind. A few probably landed in this crack. Somehow one of those seeds found soil, water, and sun enough to root, grow, and eventually blossom. Amazing! I took a few pictures of the petunia. I wanted to remember her for the lesson she taught me. What lesson?

Sometimes we think we need highly favorable conditions to thrive. We bemoan the fact that our parents were imperfect, our siblings were non-supportive, and our education was sub par. We say things like this: If only I had married Felix instead of

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Dan...If only I had joined the Dominicans instead of the Notre Dames...If only I were younger (older), taller (shorter), better looking, more intelligent, richer...If only...If only... If only. In other words, we assume if conditions were better, we would be better too—and happier.

Or we think we need ideal conditions to live our life of faith well. If only the world were a safer place... If only countries worked together more...If only our church had better leaders...If only people weren't so selfish...If only I could pray like the saints...If only I could find the right spiritual book...If only I had more time...If only...If only...If only. We pine for a life we don't have instead of embracing the life we've been given.

This petunia embraced the life it was given. When its seed was blown to this crack, it didn't bewail its placement by crying, "Look where I landed! I'm so unlucky!" Instead, it made the best of its circumstances. It held its ground and made use of the nutrients it found in its little sliver of soil. It received the rains gratefully and put its roots down deep between the asphalt and concrete. It welcomed the sun's rays each day and eventually it even blossomed.

None of us has ideal circumstances. We all struggle with adversity. We all lack some things that might seem essential for growth and development. In addition, we live and work with imperfect people—and they with imperfect us. But if we are open and attentive to our life, we will see that God is present in it—supplying the soil we need to take root. And God is providing the nutrients we need to grow too. And God is bestowing enough sun and rain for us to blossom. Lucky us!

Have you ever felt like this purple petunia?

(Note: My next blog will be posted on March 30, Holy Saturday.)

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Shauna Bankemper March 25, 2013 at 8:21 am 

I remember the petunia!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 10:20 am 

Yes, Shauna! You were on that retreat with me! Isn't it amazing that this little petunia spoke to both of us--and that we were open to listening! Melannie

REPLY

Georgia Auckly March 25, 2013 at 9:14 am 

We do all struggle with some adversity. Or as you put it in another article, "a wise elderly sister said, 'remember, every person you meet is mourning some loss.'" This petunia had a lot to say!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 10:19 am 

Yes, Georgia, it did have a lot to say--without using one word! Thanks for responding! Melannie

REPLY

Betty Nagel March 25, 2013 at 9:43 am 

The petunia looks lonely. There have been many times in my life when I've felt alone and separate from others ~ on the outskirts of life. But as the years melt away, I find that God always provides the grace and courage to "bloom where I am planted" and to (hopefully) be a grace to others as this lonely petunia was for you, Melannie, on that retreat. Thanks for your blog. This one's a "keeper" and one that I will pass along. ~ Easter Blessings and Peace to you! ~ Betty

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 10:18 am 

Dear Betty, Yes, it does look lonely...and on the "outskirts" of life. And yes, this simple flower WAS a grace for me! Melannie

REPLY

mary james March 25, 2013 at 10:11 am



I have to say that I am finally at a point where I can be grateful for the less than ideal –maybe even harsh circumstances, events, etc. in my life. It is these that have made me better emotionally, spiritually. God be praised!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 10:16 am



Dear James, Good point! We can get wiser as we mature chronologically! Thank you for sharing your wisdom! Melannie

REPLY

Pat Dangelo March 25, 2013 at 11:25 am



Thank you for your words & pictures of wisdom, Sr. Melannie! You have taken that "lonely little petunia in an asphalt patch" and sent it to bloom in our hearts! You share your gifts from God in amazing ways. The retreat you guided in PA earlier this month was beautiful! Have a blessed Holy Week & Easter! Love & Prayers,
Pat

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 5:27 pm



Dear Pat, I'm so glad the little petunia "bloomed" in your heart! And I'm glad you enjoyed the retreat in PA. God bless you! Melannie

REPLY

Annie March 25, 2013 at 12:32 pm



Dear Melannie,

I love your reflection. I think that petunia has courage! I wish you'd send your reflection to the makers of Roundup! Their macho commercials are awful.

On another "note," I think you (and your readers) might like this song: "The Flower That Shattered The Stone" (Sung by John Denver, Words and Music by Joe Henry and John Jarvis) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcVVaxnVnIM>

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 5:29 pm



Dear Annie, I agree with you about those Roundup commercials. They're so violent! And thank you for the link to the John Denver song. It's beautiful! I never heard it before. And the pictures are gorgeous! Melannie

REPLY

Kathleen Magiera April 7, 2013 at 3:06 pm



Love the John Denver song! Thanks.

Kathleen

REPLY

Maryann March 25, 2013 at 2:09 pm



Sr. Melanie, How nice it is to come to this blog for a respite! Today is a "petunia day." Oh, nothing major: Just the common irritations of work and life that we all encounter. What a helpful reminder in this week's reflection to not expend so much energy on minutia that might hold us back, but to just "grow forward" as best we can. Thanks! Maryann

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 5:30 pm



Dear Maryann, I like your phrase: "to grow forward as best we can." And you have good advice about not expending so much energy on minutia. Thank you for your sharing! Melannie

REPLY

Larry March 25, 2013 at 4:12 pm



Hi Melannie,

Once again, one of your reflections evokes the memory of my Ursuline Sister, sister. Mary Catherine journeyed to St. Joseph Retreat Center in Cohasset many summers to renew her passion for her ministry and thank God for his provision. I am also reminded of Jerusalem Rd, and that beautiful coastal area that I enjoyed each time I provided her transportation.

Vacationing in Florida now, I am also close to the FGCU cinderella basketball team that as a 15th seed just became the first ever of that ranking to make the sweet 16. They are not the best team around but they play with tremendous joy. I guess that for me it is a matter of going from WOE is me to WOW is me simply because I am a child of God.

Thanks for illiciting such memories and thank God for the blessing of people with passion.

Larry

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 5:33 pm



Dear Larry, Yes, Cohasset is a lovely place. I'll probably share more pictures from that retreat in future posts...And how about that basketball team from FGCU! They messed up my brackets-but I always cheer for Cinderella teams! And thanks for the clever WOW is me because I am a child of God! Enjoy Florida! Thanks for writing! Melannie

REPLY

Pat March 25, 2013 at 4:24 pm



I have a favorite saying "it is what it is". I say this almost daily and continue with my life and seeking God's grace knowing He is with me. I receive peace reading your blogs. You are truly a blessing for me. Thank you and have a Blessed Easter.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 25, 2013 at 5:34 pm

Dear Pat, Your "it is what it is" reminds me of the serenity prayer—about accepting the things I can't change...Blessed Easter to you too! Melannie



REPLY

marian March 25, 2013 at 10:43 pm

What a wonderful reflection on forgiveness and gratitude!
Thank you, Sr. Melanie.



REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 26, 2013 at 3:40 pm

Dear Marian, You're welcome! Sr. Melannie



REPLY

Bridget Holy March 26, 2013 at 6:19 am

As usual, an Excellent start to a Monday. I simply Love this one.



REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 26, 2013 at 10:26 am

Thank you, Bridget! Melannie



REPLY

Joan March 26, 2013 at 1:11 pm

Thanks! That hit home in my heart.



REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 26, 2013 at 3:38 pm

You're welcome, Joan! Melannie



REPLY

Mary March 26, 2013 at 4:06 pm



The day before I read your reflection, I remembered my own encounter with what I thought was a weed growing in the crack of my driveway ten years ago. For “some reason”, I didn’t pull it out, and weeks later as it grew, it turned out that the “weed” was my very own purple petunia. I had planted them in my garden the year before, and it somehow managed to find it’s way to my driveway and blossom! It reminded me that weeds aren’t always what they initially appear to be. The fact that this memory surfaced Sunday and then I read your story Monday tells me that I probably should spend more time with this – perhaps God has more to tell me!...Thank you for your weekly reflections! – Mary

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 26, 2013 at 8:26 pm



Dear Mary, It amazes me how your ten-year-old memory arose the day before you read my reflection! Yes, maybe you are being invited to spend more time with this. I really agree with you: “weeds aren’t always what they initially appear to be.” We have to give some plants more time to develop—and people too! Thanks for writing! Melannie

REPLY

Deb Dack March 26, 2013 at 7:06 pm



While on a grief retreat with my sister, I found a small purple flower growing in the middle of the gravel road. It gave me a glimmer of hope. Your petunia reminded me of this. A good reminder as Lent comes to a close.

I enjoy your reflections very much, also reading your thoughts in my daily Living Faith, with your most recent entry on “turning our mourning into joy”. How it fits well with the hope of the little purple flower.

thanks,
Deb

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 26, 2013 at 8:23 pm



Dear Deb, I certainly can see how a small flower growing in the middle of a gravel road could give you a glimmer of hope...Thank you for your

affirming words. May God bless us in all our losses...Melannie

REPLY

Karen Sedmak March 26, 2013 at 11:04 pm



Dear Sr. Melannie,

This beautiful story about the petunia reminds me ~ the other day I was looking out my front door & I can see my tulips sprouting up!!! Yes Lord Spring is about to come to PA!! Flowers are such a joy in our lives!! They bring smiles & joy to all of us! Thank you for this beautiful reflection! Have a blessed Easter Sunday.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND March 27, 2013 at 6:42 am



Dear Karen, I really agree with you about flowers! No wonder we give them as gifts to one another! Thanks for writing! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Joanne LeBel April 7, 2013 at 2:03 pm



I have been reading your passages in the Living Faith for many years and have always felt moved and enlightened by them. I am thankful to have found your blog and look forward to your insights into our faith. Wishing you all God's blessings.

REPLY

Lil Dance April 16, 2013 at 1:49 pm



I have been going through a medical setback and a friend sent this to me. I have been down and now I feel some hope, if that flower can find the light and God's nutriments in a crack I certainly can find hope in the words that have been passed on and know even if I do not have family support, I have my friends at St Joseph Heights in Covington as well as my fellow associates at SND and I realize to look up into the light and not down in the darkness because God loves me and will see me through this setback. Thanks for for words Sister

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND April 16, 2013 at 5:12 pm



Dear Lil,
I'll say a special prayer for you. Thank you for your words. I'm so glad my simple words have given you some hope. God bless you! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Linda March 8, 2015 at 9:54 am



Was reading in my daily living faith book that I picked up in church and was very inspired with your reading so thought I would look you up , I find you very inspiring

REPLY

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