

Loss and Gain



Recently I planted some Wombok (cabbage) seeds into a shallow tray filled with seed-raising mix. I watered them, placed them in a safe and partly sunny position and waited. After a week or so tiny shoots began to appear. The seeds could have remained seeds, but instead, being fertile and in a favourable place, they gave up just being seeds and opened themselves to a new and different life form. After a few more weeks, I planted out the seedlings into a prepared garden bed, as pictured above. This has allowed them the possibility of producing large leaves for us to eat, and eventually attractive yellow flowers and more seeds.

From observing nature, we know that plants and animals change over time by growing and maturing in various ways. Lives of human beings also change, involving losses and gains for us. Often a loss, even when painful, is necessary to enable the gain of new growth and development. Such changes may be the result of circumstances outside our control, or our own decisions.

As children, our lives change frequently. We usually attend school where we learn to read, write and study various subjects. We also experience discipline, responsibility, and relationships with others, and perhaps with God. On leaving school we go out to work or continue studying. Over the following years we

may change jobs, travel, live in various places, perhaps marry and have children, or stay single, and so on. These changes can be exciting for us, but not always.

After retirement and as pensioners, we usually have more time to be aware of God's presence around us. We can stop to appreciate the beauty of a sunset, and look for and discover the depth of God's love in other people as we become aware of their sufferings and share in their joys.

On the other hand, increased age brings losses that are sometimes hard to accept. Not only favourite plants and animals die, but family members and friends may be lost to us through distance or death. Our body and mind may start to manifest diminishment. We begin to say, (and hear others say!) how we used to enjoy a certain activity, but now cannot do it, or that our memory is not as good as it once was. Such changes can produce grief and challenges.

When our physical and mental losses increase to the point that makes it advisable for us to move from our home to a more suitable residence, we may be happy to make such a change. Alternatively, we may be reluctant to do so, but know it is best for our sake, and the sake of our family and friends.

Grief, arising from the loss of the home we love, may need time and space to work through and heal. It could be helpful to go alone and walk around our home farewelling it, pausing in particular rooms that hold special memories for us, and going outside to touch significant trees and sit for a while on the grass. We may then thank God for all that this home has contributed to our life.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul states, "For freedom Christ has set us free." When we cling to the past, we obstruct our freedom to embrace new possibilities. Can we gradually become free even when we are where we do not want to be?

A few years ago one of our Sisters moved into an Aged Care Facility. She was unhappy and missed her familiar home life and her ministry of visiting people in need. After a while she decided to visit her fellow residents. Soon she began to enjoy becoming their friend from the position of being one of them. She let go of the past and was free to embrace a new form of her ministry.

As the end of life draws near, we may reflect on our death. Do we want to cling to life or are we ready to leave it when the time comes? Can we trust Christ to

surround us and others we know, with love when we leave this earth?

Old age is not a time to sit back and give up living, but to remember that we are still members of Christ's body called to live meaningful and loving lives serving others in friendship, prayer and other ways. I have noticed that some older people struggle painfully with events in their past, and then, through forgiveness and healing, gain a peaceful state that becomes a blessing both to themselves and to others.

Seeds that are planted in soil, change by opening up and producing small shoots, flowers, fruit and then more seeds to continue life on earth. As human beings, we also have the possibility to open ourselves, sometimes painfully, and step into the unknown with God. In this action, I believe, we are embodying something of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We may also find that from a position beside others, we are better able to support them with our love. Then we begin to live out in a new way Jesus' direction, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34). It seems that accepting our losses can be a way to gain and share with others, who also have experienced losses, something of the joy of eternal life in God's love.

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