



And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 58:11)

I hope there are some among the readers of this devotion who are gardeners, for they will already have a good understanding of the Garden of the Soul. Here is a fine description that is given by Solomon: *"A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."* (Song 4:12-16)

This is very akin to the love and passion Christ has for His own Bride, the Church, and each heart that comprises that Church. It is generally believed that the soul resides in the spiritual heart – not the clay organ that pumps our life blood to the body, but the tender Temple of the Spirit from which flows Living Waters of Life to all who come near to it – if its occupant is Christ. This spiritual heart is what I refer to as the Garden of the Soul for it is, in so many ways, precisely like a Garden.

If you have an elementary understanding of gardening, you will know that a garden needs protecting. We erect fences and raise scarecrows around our gardens. We go out regularly to insure that nothing has invaded the garden to steal its treasures of nutritious vegetables, fruits, or flowers. One nagging problem that we must always be aware of, and expunge from the garden, are weeds and parasites. These are comparable to the spiritual desires, lusts, and temptations that confront the Garden of the Soul as well. These need no cultivation for they spring up in every place that the enemy of our soul has planted them. Those spiritual weeds will take over the Garden of the Soul if left to themselves. As the comely Shulamite Maiden (the Church) spoke unto her Beloved Solomon (Christ): *"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies."* (Song

2:15-16) We need not wonder about these 'little foxes' for they are cunning temptations that try to draw us away from the production of fruit in our Garden. They may be sins that are cherished, silently, just beneath the surface of our garden walls. All others we forsake, but we hold to that cherished "*wedge of gold.*"

It is in the Garden of our Souls that we, too, will find our Beloved Lord. He walked in the Garden, eastward in Eden, among the flowing waters and terraced beds of flora with Adam and Eve. That Garden was guarded by Angels. But they fell victim to the lies and deceits of the devil in their disobedience of their Beloved Maker. They were expelled from the Garden. They wandered in a new and nearly barren wilderness in darkness with little hope of returning to the Garden. But God, as He always does for His beloved, made a way for them long before they fell from grace – the Master Gardener (Jesus Christ) would make a way for their reconciliation with God the Father if they would only accept and follow that WAY.

So now we must guard our hearts (souls) with constant vigilance against that same voice that led astray our first parents. He lingers always near the Garden and watches for every breach in our defense. He is anxious to plant bitter-weed alongside our herbs and vegetables. One thing the veteran gardener knows is this: If you plant cucumbers or corn, the earth will render the same in multiplied quantities. If you sow the wind, you will likewise reap the whirlwind. (Hosea 8:7) The devil will happily provide you with every ill-wind you wish to sow; but the good seed come only from God. A good garden must be prepared by cultivation. Do we prepare the hearts of our youth to know Christ in the time of understanding? Cultivation is not easy – it requires concentration, effort, and discipline. But if we raise our children in the nurture of God's Word, the seed we sow will have fertile ground from which to spring forth in search of the Light of the Sun.

Once we have sown good seed, we stand by for the seed to germinate in the heart and darkness of the earth. It is much like the devoted Bible scholar who reads the Word, meditates thereon, and suddenly sees its growth burst forth into the light with astonishing beauty. So we have gotten a good start by seeing our fruits begin to sprout and grow. But someone is not at all happy. The same who disdained the beauty of God's Eden also disdains your beautiful garden. He throws into it the staple of his wicked heart – weeds. So by and by, you see these weeds spring up among your good plants. Now you must exert more effort to rid the garden of these weeds (sins). Care must be taken not to bruise the fruit of your garden. Not only do weeds spring up without cultivation, but so do insects and other varmints that labor not, but thrive on the fruits of your labor. The gardener's work is never done. In the sweat of his brow, the gardener combats every thief that would ruin his garden until comes the harvest and he takes his rest in the shade, and enjoys the fruit of his labor. The devout Christian shuns the wicked urge and expunges it from the Garden of his Soul. He is ever vigilant until the day of harvest finally arrives when the shadows lengthen and the fever of life abates. He has no regrets. I have never heard a deathbed confession, or a prayer from a dying soldier on the battlefield, that laments the lack of not having sinned more in life. The desire is always that they would have done more good and less evil.

There is yet another kind of pestilence with which the gardener must contend – THIEVES. They seem to feel more at home in the churches of America today than in any previous time. They wish to steal the fruit of God's house and mal-appropriate it. While a young man living in the Far East, I saw that every large paddy or orchard was furnished with a tall tower made of slender wooden frames. They were everywhere, and I knew that they could not be for the purpose of sighting forest fires. The local farmers told me that these were watchtowers to keep thieves from stealing the fruit of their labors. The Garden of our Soul needs the Watchtower of God's Word for the same

purpose. The wolf in sheep's clothing cannot forever wear his disguise. There are many clues by which we may know him if we read our Bibles with the diligence he reads his.

Remember, *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."* (James 2:19) That old serpent, the devil, knows the Voice of Christ and His Word well – and so do his minions. But they do not accept the Lordship of Christ. They are after those souls that belong to Christ, and we must be vigilant against his evil designs. He is a traitor that may march under our colors and wear our uniform.

The joy of the Garden has always been for our benefit. The first Garden at Eden was for our benefit until Adam squandered away the gift. The Garden at Gethsemane was for our sole benefit, but was the great hurt of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a Garden through which He must go if He was to redeem us. It was the time of cultivation and sowing (His own Body) that was at Gethsemane. We, the cast-out gardeners, only observed from afar His Passion and pain.

There was another Garden to which the beloved Mary Magdalene came, furtively, while it was yet dark. She came seeking the dead body of her Beloved Lord. What joy would she find in this Garden that was so near to that dreadful Hill of Golgotha? Not finding His dead Body, she was in sore distress. Her tears were profuse and even blinded her. "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30:5) Suddenly, her abject grief was turned to ecstasy. Her profuse tears of sorrow were turned, in an instant, to tears of Joy. (Need I tell you that I consider this the most tender passage of all of Scripture?) The long night of Jesus entombment was about to burst forth in brilliant morning light!

*"And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, **Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?** She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, **Mary.** She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." (John 20:1-16)*

Knowing Jesus by His appearance is not enough! We must have a heart-knowledge of Him as did Mary. She mistook Him for the gardener! Was that a mistake? No, it was not for Jesus is the **Master Gardener** of the Garden of our Souls and of that first Garden at Eden, which He made for us.

What a joy for the Christian believer to seek Christ early, while it is yet dark, and to hear Him tenderly call our name in a way that no man can do! No one could pronounce the name of Lazarus as did Jesus outside the Tomb at Bethany. No man could pronounce the name of Mary as did Jesus outside His own borrowed tomb in that early morning Garden. No one can pronounce your name the way Jesus does when He calls you. Even in the sleep of death, His Voice echoes down the annals of time and eternity to enliven and quicken a heart that has ceased to be among the land of the living. Back to the Garden He calls you. There is labor to do in His Vineyard.

Have you heard that Voice, friends?