

The Flower Communion

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Unitarian Universalist Meeting House in Chatham

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Introduction

The Unitarian Universalist Flower Communion service which we are about to celebrate was originated in 1923 by Dr. Nobeř Čapek [pronounced Chah-Peck], founder of the modern Unitarian movement in Czechoslovakia. On the last Sunday before the summer recess of the Unitarian church in Prague, all the children and adults participated in this colorful ritual, which gives concrete expression to the humanity-affirming principles of our liberal faith. When the Nazis took control of Prague in 1940, they found Dr. Čapek's gospel of the inherent worth and beauty of every human person to be-as Nazi court records show-- "...too dangerous to the Reich [for him] to be allowed to live." Dr. Čapek was sent to Dachau, where he was killed the next year during a Nazi "medical experiment." This gentle man suffered a cruel death, but his message of human hope and decency lives on through his Flower Communion, which is widely celebrated today. It is a noble and meaning-filled ritual we are about to recreate. This service includes the original prayers of Dr. Čapek to help us remember the principles and dreams for which he died.

The Consecration

Whenever Dr. Čapek conducted his Flower Communion in Prague, he would say this blessing as he "consecrated" the flowers:

Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask thy blessing on these, thy messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid diversities of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to thy holy will. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another's talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that, whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do thy work in this world.

Partaking of the Communion

It is time now for us to share in the Flower Communion. I ask that as you each in turn approach the communion vase you do so quietly--reverently--with a sense of how important it is for each

of us to address our world and one another with gentleness, justice, and love. I ask that you select a flower--different from the one you brought--that particularly appeals to you. As you take your chosen flower--noting its particular shape and beauty--please remember to handle it carefully. It is a gift that someone else has brought to you. It represents that person's unique humanity, and therefore deserves your kindest touch.

Homily

I want to offer at this point a few of my own reflections about flowers and their meaning. At the Question and Answer session following Ursula Goodenough's Fleck Lecture on Darwin and the Sacred in February, I asked a question about whether the universe had a purpose, to which Dr. Goodenough replied that Darwin considered that that question was blowing in the wind. Gene Pickett then interjected, "But the purpose of a flower is to bloom, is that not...?" to which Dr. Goodenough, the cell biologist, replied "Oh, the purpose of a flower is to make nookie. No, flowers are reproductive organs, and the purpose of the rest of the plant is to get the flower going. That's one way of looking at life."

The flower is part of the reproductive system of the plant, and you and I and the bees and other insects are all part of that system. We all know that attraction, love, is what makes human reproduction work; none of us would be sitting here today if our parents hadn't been attracted to one another. But it is humbling and grand to contemplate that the attractiveness of the flower is what makes plant life possible.

This is the season when flowering plants are on sale in nurseries and farmers markets and grocery stores. We will buy these plants for their beautiful flowers and take them home and plant them in our gardens. Thus we will assure their reproductive success and propagate their species. In an environment in which human choice makes a difference, the flowers which are most beautiful to humans will enjoy a reproductive advantage. Keats said of a Grecian urn, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."
What truth is in the flower you hold in your hand?
Let us reflect on our flowers silently for a moment.

The Communion Prayer

Listen now to Dr. Çapek's Flower Communion prayer:

In the name of Providence, which implants in the seed the future of the tree and in the hearts of men [and women] the longing for people living in [human] love; in the name of the highest. in whom we move and who makes the mother and father, the brother and sister what they are; in the name of sages and great religious leaders, who sacrificed their lives to hasten the coming of [peace and justice]--let us renew our resolution--sincerely to be real brothers and sisters regardless of any kind of bar which estranges one from another. In this holy resolution may we be strengthened, knowing that we are God's family, that one spirit, the spirit of love, unites us, and [may we] endeavor for a more perfect and more joyful life. Amen.

Closing Words

Just before he was put to death in Dachau, Dr. Çapek wrote this prayer. reflecting on his own life and the state of his spirit:

It is worthwhile to live and fight courageously for sacred ideals.

Oh blow ye evil winds into my body's fire; my soul you'll never unravel.

Even though disappointed a thousand times or fallen in the fight and everything would worthless seem,

I have lived amidst eternity.

Be grateful, my soul,

My life was worth living.

He who was pressed from all sides but remained victorious in spirit is welcomed into the choir of heroes.

He who overcame the fetters giving wing to the mind is entering into the golden age of the victorious.