

GARDENS OF BEAUTY AND HOPE

Slide 1- Gardens of Beauty and Hope

“Hail, Virgin Mary, hope of God’s people; you come to the aid of all who have no hope, you look with love on all who seek your help.” Lord our God, you give us the joy of honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of divine hope. In your mercy grant that, through her prayers and help, we may always live as good citizens of this world, with our hearts fixed on the world to come, and so receive what we look forward to in faith, the fulfillment of all our hope. Amen.

Slide 2- God Saw that it was good.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over all the earth. And God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit and I have given every green plant for food.” And so it was. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Gen. 1:1,26-27,29, 31) God was delighted after he created Man since we read in Genesis that God walked in the Garden with Man.

When we are creative, we give back to God in the experience of continuing His creation as a response to His love for us as His children. Moreover, our creative spirit is a reflection of God’s own handiwork and when we create something beautiful, we make God’s goodness tangible.

Slide 3- Lead with Beauty

St. John Paul II emphasized the interconnectedness of truth, goodness, and beauty. He believed that beauty can lead us to the good, and both point towards the truth which is embodied in Christ. He said that truth, goodness and beauty are not separate or isolated concepts, but rather different aspects of the same reality, ultimately reflecting God. A quote from Bishop Robert Barron states, “Lead with the Beauty, then the Good, then the True.”

Slide 4 - Beauty

God is Beauty, is a book which is based on a retreat given by Karol Wojtyla (St. John Paul II) at the Church of the Holy Cross in Krakow in April of 1962. In it he states that, “everything found in the concept of “good” is fulfilled in God alone. We can also say of him that he is beautiful. That means, he is **Beauty**. God alone is absolute **Beauty**. Beauty is found in the whole of creation and the works of human beings. **Beauty delights and attracts.**”

We all have our particular definitions of beauty. Whether it is found in the beauty of the mountains, the sea, a sunrise or sunset, in the faces our children, a smile from someone suffering in the midst of misery, or in snails or snowflakes – beauty is everywhere and in everyone. When we see something beautiful, we feel drawn to it and want to embrace it.

When we appreciate Beauty, we find hope. St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans (15:13), “May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Do we truly believe in what we hope for?

Slide 5 – Quotes from St. John Paul and St. Francis

In St. Francis’ Canticle of The Creatures, we see how St. Francis saw Beauty – that is God – in all of creation especially in mankind. St. Francis was in such a state of awe and wonder of God’s creation that he composed this poem-song giving praise to God through all the elements of the earth calling them Brother and Sister. When he was close to death, again, he gave praise to God for Sister Death knowing that he was shortly going to receive his reward – such was his hope in Jesus’ promise of heaven and the resurrection. St. Bonaventure wrote, “Francis sought occasion to love God in everything. In everything beautiful, he saw him who is beauty itself.”

Slide 6 – Prayer is Hope

Rule – Article 8 “As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.”

When we realize that Jesus has not abandoned us, we gain confidence and hope; which is confidence that God is in charge of all His creation and has a loving plan for each one of us here on earth and in heaven with Him.

Slide 7- Gardens/Fraternity – I

In the book of Genesis, we are told about the Garden of Eden. In the Gospels, we hear about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the tomb for Jesus was in a garden. Gardens seem to be special places, sacred places to meet God. Gardens whether they are vegetable, flower, water, or stone gardens all have elements of order, beauty, and bring life and pleasure into our world just as God did when he created us.

When forming a garden you need to plan – where to place it for the best sunlight or shade, and have a vision for what to expect from it. Our fraternities need a vision; we need to recognize our purpose – who are we serving? All gardens are unique and so also our fraternities. Each one needs care: nurturing - (water and fertilizer for gardens) and good formation in fraternity gatherings.

Our fraternities, like gardens, bring us hope for the future. We plant seeds of faith, hope and love to grow vocations. It takes patience to wait for the promised beauty that will appear. Pruning and maintenance are a must in order to thrive. As gardeners we must be looking out for weeds that can suck out the nutritious Holy Spirit in our fraternities. What kind of weeds could be growing in our fraternities? Despondency? Conflicts? Negativity? Gossip?

Another technique in gardening is “thinning”. In a garden, you don’t want to stifle newly grown plants and you spread them out to another area. In a large fraternity, we don’t want to stifle new growth either. Let’s embrace newly forming groups and celebrate emerging fraternities – they are such a sign of hope for our Order. Any plant that is not thriving, transplanting it into more fertile soil or a place of adequate sunshine and water usually will produce fruit again. How would you describe the “soil” of your fraternity? Is it hard and dry or soft and receptive to new growth, formation and prayer? There is strength in numbers – picture one sunflower and then picture a field of them. We are strengthened when we come together during our Pastoral/Fraternal visitations, Elections and retreats.

Slide 8 - Gardens and Fraternity - II

When it’s harvest time, we see the results of our labors, celebrate our successes, learn from our mistakes and re-evaluate as we look toward the future. Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.” In Galatians 6:9 we read, “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up.”

As in gardens and life in fraternity, there are cycles and seasons; and in every season, hope can be found. In November after the harvest there is a time for rest. Late fall and early winter are perfect times to go deeper into our prayer life as we enter Advent, Christmas and Lent. In our rest, we need to meet the Divine Gardner who has come into our life to restore, heal, guide, and keep us forever in his plan of creation. Now we all wait in patience in hope of the heavenly garden which Jesus has promised us through His resurrection.

Slide 9 - HOPE

We all know what a neglected garden looks like. It’s especially sad when it could have been saved. The good news is that these neglected gardens can come alive again with some care, nurturing, and love. When we allow Jesus the Master Gardener to work in our hearts and fraternities to be fertile ground, we will be able to share an abundant harvest of love and hope for the future.

HOPE AMIDST DARK CLOUDS (Inspired by Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis)

May your light break through dark clouds, O Lord!

May your hope grow in our hearts – even when the skies feel ominous.

Fear, isolation, individualism, conflict; these are the winds that blow gust of racism and inequality in our “throw away world”.

But we are saved together; not alone. So, teach us, Lord to hope. Show us the goodness you continue to sow. Show us the boldness of love to reject fear and embrace our neighbor.

Make fertile the ground where seeds fall. Bring gentle rain and warm rays of sunlight. May we know your love shines bright. Through dark clouds, may your hope shine again. Amen.

Brothers and Sisters, we must dispel the dark clouds of evil: War, violence, hatred, mass shootings, slavery; these are not beautiful – they are not of God. Our fraternities are sacred gardens of beauty where hope can grow and where we can cultivate change in our world. They are places of creativity that can reflect God’s goodness and love.

Everyone is good if we choose to see the good. Everything is beautiful if we choose to seek **Beauty in** us and **around** us. How does your garden grow?

References: Beauty – A Path to God, Anthony Ciorra
God is Beauty, Karol Wojtyla, (St. John Paul II)
Finding God in the Garden, Devotions for Every Season – Editors of Guideposts
Holy Bible
Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order