

Consider the lilies of the field.

Not what you will eat, or what you will wear, but consider the birds and the lilies.

Right. Easy for you to say Jesus. We'll figure out what you meant and get back to you.

In the mean time, we have work to do.

We've got a ballet recital, the prom, graduation, and the family is all coming to our house for the graduation and I've got to the grocery store and the cleaners and cook dinner and then catch up on email and pay the bills and do the laundry and fix lunches and start this all over in the morning. And yes, there's a doctor's appointment and the grass needs to be cut and the house has to be cleaned.

Consider the lilies of the field.

We don't exactly have time for that Jesus, so we'll get back to you.

I've been trying to consider the lilies of the field this week. It's not easy, is it? But some days I think it sure would be nice to be a lily or a bird for that matter flying high in the sky with the Blue Angels.

Lilies don't have to worry about a thing. They are beautiful. Glorious. They are our symbol of new life and resurrection at Easter. And they have a fragrance that is almost beyond description.

If you take time to consider it, our sense of smell is one of the most powerful senses that we have. A scent can bring about so many feelings in your mind and in your body, from feelings of delight to feelings of nausea. Feelings of hate, to feelings of arousal. When I was growing up, my aunt owned a florist shop. So now, lilies and roses make me think about weddings while chrysanthemums and carnations make me think about funerals. Old Spice aftershave makes me think about my dad, while mothballs make me think about the little old lady that hugged me every Sunday at church

Did you know that there is a Sense of Smell Institute found at www.senseofsmell.org? You really should check it out. It's quite fascinating. There is an interesting study I found in *Aging Well with your Sense of Smell: A Handbook for Baby Boomer*. "In a study conducted in a large shopping mall, Dr. Robert A. Baron of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute found that individuals exposed to pleasant odors were more likely to help a stranger than individuals not exposed to such odors. In this study, persons exposed to pleasant smells rated their own moods as significantly more positive than those not exposed to smells. A significantly higher proportion of passersby were willing to help other people when a pleasant fragrance was present in the air than when it was not. When asked to describe their current mood, those exposed to pleasant fragrances reported that they felt happier and more positive than those not exposed to pleasant odors."^[i]

So as I considered the lilies of the field this week, I also considered what the fragrance of God is. It's a funny question isn't it? My first thought was that God smelled like lilies - pure, elegant and full of grace. But then I started remembering my aunt's flower shop. I remember that on Fridays before a wedding walking in to the work room and almost passing out. There would be about 10 bridesmaids' bouquets and huge church arrangements full of white Casablanca lilies. The aroma was so powerful. It bowled you over. Like walking past one of those candle shops or the Bath and Body Works store in the mall. The scent and power of the fragrance can be overwhelming, overpowering, too much to handle.

Sometimes like God's love.

So I decided God doesn't smell like a lily. That was on Wednesday.

So on Thursday I had some yard work to do and I found myself at the garden center ordering mulch. The mulch was delivered and over the past two days I have been spreading four yards of mulch around my flower beds. I love spreading mulch. It's a glorious experience for me. It makes everything in the garden look new. It's like laying carpet. All is well, and the plants say thank you every time you walk by them. They are so glad to have an extra defense from the weeds and some insurance against the dry summer days. But mulch smells. Actually it

stinks. It smells like manure and rotting leaves and shredding wood and it's hot and steamy and not in a good way. It's hard to handle, sometimes like God's love.

But mulch also brings the promise of new life and it turns in to soil and feeds the plants that bring us oxygen and resurrection, sometimes like God's love.

But it's Sunday now, and still the question begs, what does God smell like? I guess the answer is a deeply personal one for all of us. Maybe it's warm chocolate. Perhaps it's the smell of your beloved's hair when they get out of the shower. Maybe it's the scent of an infant just after a bath. Maybe it's an old teddy bear or the blanket you had as a child that you never wanted your mother to wash. Whatever that aroma is for you, you know the feeling. The first hint of it transforms you to another time and another space in the blink of an eye.

That is what the smell of God is. That is what the smell of love is. And Jesus tells us this morning we need to take more time to stop and smell the lilies. The smell of God's love will transform you into a different person in the blink of an eye. The smell of love makes you want to stop and do something for somebody else. That's what Jesus does. He transforms us, and his love demands that we show forth that love in our lives those around us. But you have to stop and pay attention.

We have to take a break from the to-do list and find time to get intimate with God. The list will wait. We have to let go of the anxiety and the worries and remember that God has created the lilies and the mulch, the good and the sometimes smelly. God has it all worked out, and we don't need to add 'being God' to our to-do list. I read in a new book entitled *Outflow* that "Worry is a lack of trust. It's a lack of trust that God is big enough or loving enough to care for your problems...It's this fear that if you leave your life up to God you'll be disappointed in the outcome." (from page 68: *Outflow* by Steve Sjogren & Dave Ping. Published by Group 2006)

Instead of worrying, we need to stop and give thanks. It's interesting that today's gospel reading from Matthew is also the reading for Thanksgiving Day. Giving thanks should be simple enough. Logically, we all know we have **more to thank God for** than to ask God for. But ironically, whenever we say the prayers of the people and leave silence for prayers of petition or thanksgiving, the list of *petitions* is always much longer. We want things, we want healing, we want forgiveness, we want restoration, we want relaxation, we want justice, we want peace, we want diversity, we want equality. Yet all God wants is gratitude and praise. Gratitude and praise for the abundance we have been given.

Jesus preaches to us to chill out. Profound statement of theology I know. 'Chill out. Let your anxiety about worldly things go. Isn't life about more than food or your body more than clothing? God knows your every need. You don't have to ask for anything. If you seek God's kingdom first and his righteousness, you will have everything that you could possibly need.'

Now Jesus does not tell us to give up on the details or to become carefree and irresponsible. There are things that will not simply take care of themselves. There are people we must care for. There is work to do in the fields, but the challenge we hear from Jesus tonight is not to let the anxiety overcome us. Don't worry about how things will work out tomorrow, something will happen.

You see, when I got around to my back yard yesterday with my next to last wheelbarrow full of mulch, I saw something. It was a green shoot springing up from the dry earth behind a daylily. As I got down on my hands and knees, I realized what it was. It is a Casablanca lily. I did not plant it, but it was there when we bought the house. But last year, I watched the stalk grow and grow toward the sun, it was about three feet tall and I was so excited. But a huge storm came and tree branch broke the lily stalk to the ground. I was devastated because it never bloomed last year. I gave up on it and thought it was finished. Jesus said, 'Consider the lilies,' but lilies die. But you see, God has this thing all worked out. We don't have to worry. Lilies are bulbs, and this year, it's back. And you better believe I mulched around it and have tied it to a stake, because this year, come hell or high water, I'm going to get a hint of the fragrance of God.

^[1] Robert A. Baron, "Of Cookies, Coffee and Kindness: Pleasant Odors & the Tendency to Help Strangers in a Shopping Mall", *Aroma-Chology Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1, January 1997.