

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A COCONUT.

P.Ribes, sj.

Encountering our Inner Riches

Self-Esteem

Intent of this Story.

- ✓ *To grow in self-esteem.*
- ✓ *To learn to deal with people in an 'affirmative' way.*
- ✓ *To discover our inner riches*
- ✓ *To thank God for all the talents He gave us*

The Story

I was born along with my brothers and sisters atop one of those sturdy trees that grow in sandy soil along the coastal strip.

From my perch I could command an imposing view of the world around me. Life was fun! I was happy! To tell the truth I was proud of being a coconut, and I thought my father was great

Till one day, I heard some passers-by curse my father and all of us.

“It’s so hot today! If only this blasted coconut tree could give us some shade to rest under. I hate coconuts, so rough, so barren, no leaves, no flowers, no scent, and no beauty. And look at those coconuts up there. How funny they look, so dull, so shapeless! They hide up there, so that none of us may touch them. I curse them! You know a friend of mine died trying to catch some coconuts, just image!”

Instantly, I felt miserable. Something changed within me I said: “Yes! They are right. How could I have not seen all this before? I am ugly, deformed, dark, and funny to look at. I am good for nothing. I felt ashamed of myself. I said, No one should ever see the ugliness that is in me!” And with that I began building all around me a very thick, hard and resistant shell that no one should see my inside. I had to hide my ugliness from others. I thought to myself: “If ever anyone sees me as I am, he will despise me, reject me. I have to protect myself from others”.

To repel people and keep them at arm’s length, I began spinning around my shell a thick layer of a brownish, rough, hairy stuff unpleasant to the touch. I did not want anyone come close to me or touch me. I spent my days all by myself, dejected, way from friends and companions. I hardly spoke to my brothers and sisters. My only preoccupation was to hide myself from others.

One day, there was a great storm. The gale shook my father's body from the very roots. We were tossed about and rocked this way and that. I was terrified. I clung to my father's body for dear life. But in vain! All of a sudden, I lost my father's grip. Ah!...Ahh!...Oooh!... what a dreadful feeling... I was falling.... falling...in an emptiness.

Finally, I found myself hurtled on the ground and lying there, full of bruises, hurts and wounds. How it pained. Whilst on the tree I was in the company of my brothers and sisters. Here I was alone and lonely! I thought it was the end of me!

Then, all of a sudden I saw one of those hateful passersby walking along the path that passes under the coconut tree. He was a young lad. I was afraid. He saw me lying on the ground; he came closer, he looked at me and with joy exclaimed. "Oh! How lucky I am! What a lovely coconut I see! I am so glad!"

I could not believe my ears. Could anyone ever like me? Or be happy because of me? Believe it or not, the boy stopped in front of me, bent down, gently picked me up, examined me, he smelt me, he shook me next to his ear and joyfully exclaimed: "Oh! What a fresh, sweet, tasty, juicy coconut you are."

What!? Me! Fresh? Sweet? Tasty?? Lovely? I., of all? Does this boy know what he says? I? the ugly, hardened, hairy, shapeless, selfish, useless coconut? I wanted to tell the boy... and even tried to tell him: "You are mistaken: leave me alone. Don't waste your time on me".

But the boy with the excitement at having me would hear nothing of it. He knew me, he believed in me more than I believed in myself. He sat on the ground, kept me on his lap in between his legs and patiently began pulling off from me, layer after layer, all that rough hairy stuff I had, so laboriously, coiled around me. It pained me a lot. After all, it was a part of me. But, he did it so carefully and lovingly....

Yet, for all the pain I suffered and all his labor, the only thing he found was a hard, black and impenetrable shell, the one I had built around myself for so many days. I thought, I was right and that the boy was wrong. After so much excitement and joy what good did he find in me?

And now the worst and the best part of the story began/ . The boy who so far had been so patient and loving, pressed me hard against the ground. Took a big stone and started mercilessly striking me. I yelled...I screamed.

He went on striking me. He believed that inside that hard and ugly shell there was beauty, sweetness, taste, and whiteness. He hit, hit and hit. Till at last, with a loud sound I cracked! But, lo and behold! Some sweet, fresh and tasty juice began pouring from my cracks.

With delight, the boy kissed me on my wounds and joyfully, drinking of my newly discovered sweetness, exclaimed: "Vow!...sss.. How tasty you are! How good, how lovely you are! It's my luck I found you today!"

Finally, he cleaved me into two, and opened me up completely... and believe it or not, I discovered within myself such spotless whiteness, such immaculate beauty that I could not believe my eyes! In an ecstasy of delight I said to myself: "Oh, I am beautiful! I am charming! I am sweet! I am tasty! People like me! People want me! I like me, I love myself!"

Thoughts for reflection

- Every man is like a coconut. Beneath a harsh exterior there are hidden treasures of sweetness and goodness.
- Because we ignore our inner riches, we harden our outward appearance to hide the poor image we have of ourselves..
- God made every person unique, beautiful and precious.
- The societies of which we are a part who sets up arbitrary societal standards that make people feel inadequate, deficient and unworthy.
- No child is ever born with an 'inferiority complex'. We create them for him!
- The opinions of others about us, influence us more than what we can think of.
- In life we do not 'act'. We rather 'react'. We are not "actors", but 'reactors'.
- We, unawares, allow others, and our society, and other external influences to shape our lives and future
- We are prone to believe people's perception of us rather than our own. .
- Unless others believe in us, we will not believe in ourselves.
- Fear of being rejected by others leads us to self-rejection.
- It is from the outside only, that a process of improving our self- esteem may start.
- Someone has to believe in us, in order that we may believe in ourselves.
- Most of the time, the 'ugliness' we show is a false front we put up to keep others at arms length.
- Our fear of being hurt makes us build walls and hard shells around us.
- The ugly walls and shells we built are not part of us. They have to be broken down if ever others have to see the hidden beauty and treasures locked within us.
- If we reject ourselves, if we do not esteem ourselves, what right do we have to expect others to esteem and accept us?
- What pains us most is not the fact of being rejected by others but that their rejection 'confirms' our unworthiness and unlovability.
- We should not take too much to heart the disparaging remarks others make of us.
- If others like us, well and good. If they do not, all the worse for them! We can't expect all people to love us!
- The best gift we can offer others is our 'unconditional' self-acceptance.
- Trusting others, showing respect for them and expressing our admiration for them, is the only way to break the hard shell of their poor self-esteem.
- We have to be extremely careful of the remarks we make about others, chiefly the young, the weak, the poor, the fretful, the shy and the insecure.
- A little indiscretion from our part may trigger in them a process of withdrawal, of self-dislike, even self-hatred.

Personal Reflection

1. Has my life, somewhat, been like the one of the coconut?
2. Did I build defenses to protect my poor self-image? Which? What to I hide? Why?
3. How shall I enhance myself-esteem and myself-image from now on?
4. Did help others to find their reaches? Why?
5. What can I do from now on?