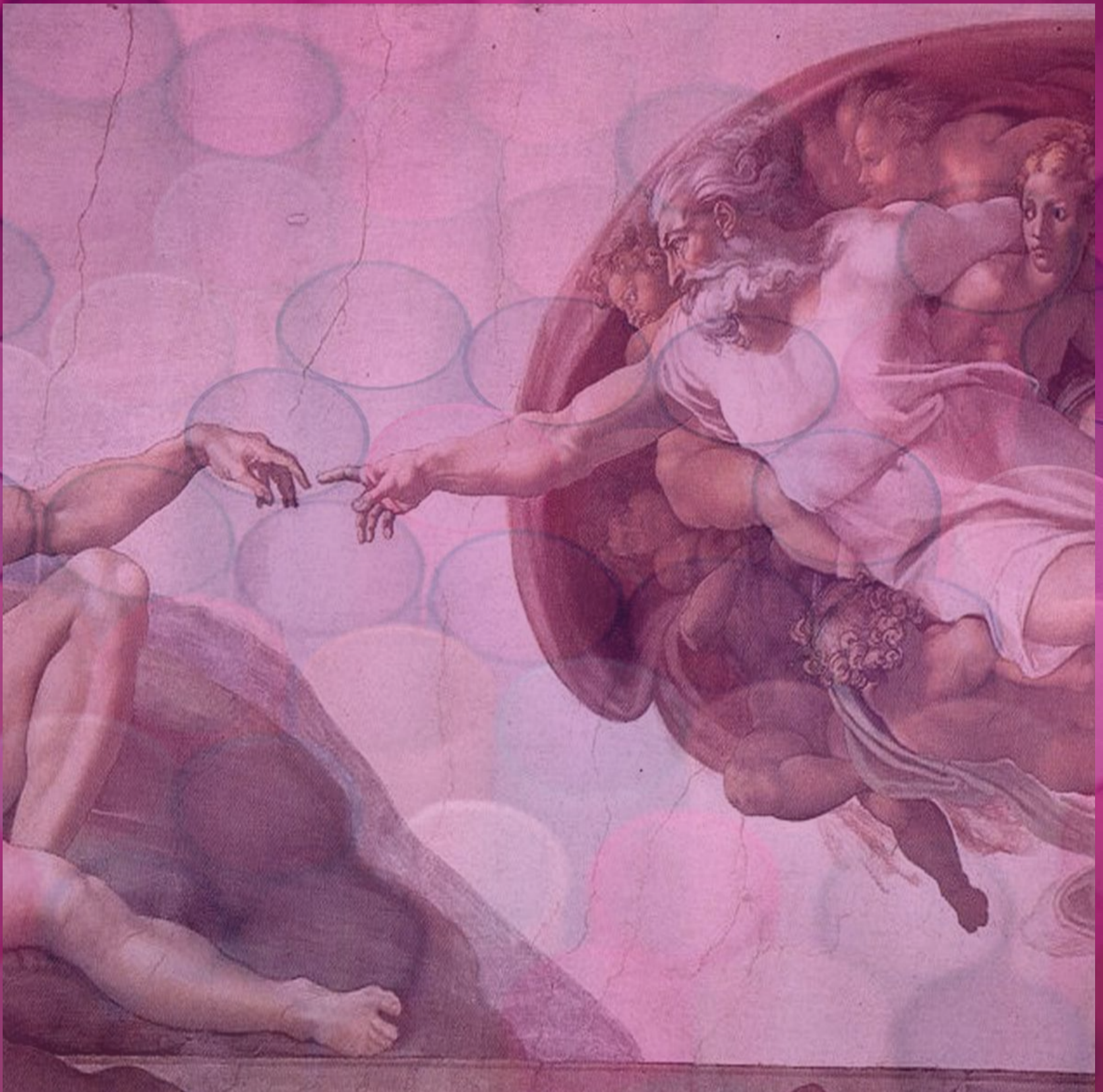


LONGING - BELONGING - GROWTH

24 January 2021



We are made for longing

Reflecting on the past months, strange as they have been, there is a sense of a certain shift in our being, thinking and acting due to the pandemic. Having been through circuit breaker and social distancing, we cannot deny the fact that we are made for relationship with others. In the space of the distance between us, there came a longing or perhaps a list of longings for fulfilment, for connection, for growth, that nothing material could substitute.

These longings somehow amplified the most essential elements of our life including the ones pointing beyond our worldly desires. Our human condition tells us that nothing here on earth can possibly satisfy us. St Augustine's life experiences showed him that his heart remained restless until it found rest in God. This statement is true for every human being even when it is still not yet acknowledged.



In a powerful way Rainer Marie Rilke, an Austrian poet, expresses in his poem **'Book of Hours'** the nature of longings that are shared mutually between God and His creatures.

*God speaks to each of us as He makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night.
These are the words we dimly hear: You, sent out beyond your recall, Go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me. Flare up a flame and make big shadows I can move in.
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going.
No feeling is final. Don't let yourself lose me.
Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness.
Give me your hand.*

Rilke speaks here of the reality of life that we may claim as part of our experience and that we are invited to embrace in its beauty and terror. It is love, beauty and truth just as well as suffering and difficulties through which we grow and embody the desire of our Maker for us. The deepest longing in human beings is for the presence of the Other (God) while, paradoxically, never being without the Other.

As the poem's last words say **'give me your hand'** - God is always with us and provides the manna for the journey, our daily bread. Deprived of the possibility of attending Mass, we experienced a Eucharistic thirst. The desire for spiritual communion can be realised at any time, however, as longing for Him in the Eucharistic presence shall never be extinguished. How much stronger is God's longing for His union with us in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Christianity is incarnational and hence not only did God become flesh in Jesus Christ but He gives us His promise that *"anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life"* (John 6:54). Eternal life is not just a reality to be expected in the future but it can be experienced now. May our longing for eternal life find no limits in our hearts.



The Parable of the Chinese Bamboo Tree

One of the most unique and amazing plants in the world is the Chinese Bamboo Tree. This tree is much different than most trees in that it doesn't grow in the typical fashion. Like all plants, growth of the Chinese Bamboo tree requires nurturing – water, fertile soil and plenty of sunshine. In the first year, we see no visible sign of activity. In the second year, again, no growth above the soil. The third year, the fourth, still nothing. This process continues for four agonising long years. For four years it seems like we are totally wasting our efforts.

The tree lies dormant for four years only to grow exponentially in the fifth year – behold, a miracle! The tree finally breaks the surface of the ground and in the space of five weeks grows to an astounding height of 90 feet. It is as if the tree grows right before a person's eye.

When we read of this amazing wonder of life, we can't help but think of the time and effort we invest in our homes, work and even ministries during this global pandemic. Often without any evidence of growth or life. There have been many times we have invested our time, talent and finances in a person, work and ministry without evidence that it would pay off. There have been times, because of this, that we have given up on a person or even ministry and call it quits, and throw in the towel.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up".
(Galatians 6:7-9)



NETWORKING AND SPREADING OF ROOTS

What most people do not understand about the Chinese Bamboo Tree is that the growth is not all occurring during that five-week span in the fifth year. But underneath the ground, the seed has actually sprouted within days of being planted. During those first four years this Bamboo Tree is actually growing into a very strong, deep and extensive root system below the surface of the ground. This extensive root system is necessary to sustain the life of this amazing tree.



The Big Picture

One cannot see this growth within the naked eye, but one who understands plants knows exactly what is happening. We cannot see, yet the plant is growing. Yet we keep feeding, watering and providing sunlight to it because if we stop, the plant will die. This is the big picture of our Christian Faith. Those of us who truly walk by faith know that God is going to do what He promised He would do. Our faith in God is what keeps us going. We continue to invest our time and energy into Kingdom Building because we understand that something is happening just beneath the surface. Whatever is happening beneath the surface is a necessary part of the answer. We may not see the answer today, but that doesn't mean the answer is not being worked on today. Our Christian faith in God gives us the patience to keep working and waiting until His answer does come.

St James says beautifully, ***"For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"*** (James 1:3). The Letter to the Hebrews says: ***"So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"*** (Hebrews 6:12). We may have enough faith, but not enough patience. Let us allow our faith to work patience in us. When we allow our faith and our patience to work together, God says, ***"you will inherit the promise!"*** We will receive our answer. Our work, our marriage, our relationship, our ministry will succeed!

Germination time does not mean nothing is growing. ***Longing, Belonging, Growth*** is at work, for the seeds and for us who allow God space and time to make things happen in due time.

Don't Quit

Don't quit now, we have come too far to turn back. Don't give up! There is something happening just beneath the surface! Keep working. Keep watering. Keeping ministering. Keep witnessing. Keep praying, and ***"we shall reap if we do not lose heart."***

Some food for thought

1. What and who do I long for the most at this time? God? Health? End of Pandemic? Better marital relationship? More peace and harmony at home?
2. Amidst the turmoil and challenges at home, at work and in my ministry, where do I find solace and comfort? During my walks in nature? On my bed pondering before I fall asleep? During my daily prayer time? After receiving Jesus at Holy Communion? Over a meal with a loved one?
3. What struck me most from the poem by Rainer Maria Rilke? What is the message for me? And how can I apply it in my life at this moment?



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