

A Rose as the Ant Crawls

As the old saying goes, April showers bring May flowers, and no other flower captures our attention quite like the rose. Roots, Stem, thorns, petals. Simple and yet elegant, its beauty captivates us. Allusions to the rose as a symbol of love and beauty can be traced to at least as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman goddesses Venus and Aphrodite. It appears everywhere in our culture, from romantic gifts to song titles to the name of a major college football bowl game. We use it extensively, even in religion. Christianity, specifically, has used the rose for many allusions and metaphors over the ages. For example, the five petals of the rose have been used to describe the five wounds of Jesus Christ and the blood of the early Christian martyrs. It has even been used to represent the Virgin Mary.

While the rose is useful for delivering these meanings, I believe it can be used even more effectively. The symbolism for all of these representations is of a rather narrow nature; instead of a deeper message being conveyed, a simplistic swap of images takes place. Perhaps more importantly, these representations look at the rose exclusively, isolating it from its surroundings and role in nature. A rose that is pampered in a vase is pleasant looking, if not a little artificial. A rose that thrives in a garden or in the wild is a thing of beauty, an organic machine running on all cylinders. Our perspective on the rose is also an impediment. We have a tendency to only consider the rose while looking down on it, towering above like a giant. Or better yet, like God views us. We never stop to think of the rose from the ground up, say, the way an ant would.

Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine that you are, in fact, an ant on the ground who wishes to reach its ultimate goal, the petals. The petals are a place in which several smaller insects can be found for the ant to feast on, a place that holds and collects life-sustaining water,

and a place that provides all that the ant needs. A place that is surprisingly comparable to what many of us envision as heaven.

But heaven as we know it is not a given, much like the ant's path up the rose. The ant's journey to the rose petals is precarious, and could cost it its life. There are birds and larger insects lurking in the shadows, waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting ant. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the ant makes constant progress and does not waste time. The logical path would be to take the shortest distance possible, a straight line from the ground to the rose petals. Unfortunately, this is not a reality. Obstacles in the form of thorns are firmly planted in the ant's path. The ant climbs onto the rose and scurries up the stem as fast as it can, but would crash into a looming thorn if it gets too carried away. The ant must adjust its course if it hopes to avoid pricking itself on the thorn. Let's say the ant does not foresee the problem of a thorn the first time and crashes into it headfirst during its mad dash to the rose petals. The ant injures itself, but learns a small, but valuable lesson: the thorns will hurt it. It backtracks a good distance, negotiates its way around the thorn, and nervously crashes up the stem again. The ant barely clears the first thorn when a second thorn appears. This time, it knows that it needs to avoid the thorn, but it does not react in time and again injures itself on the thorn. Again, the ant backtracks a good deal and chooses a new path, one that now deliberately negotiates all the thorns, and it reaches the rose petals safely. This is not a direct path and consequently takes significantly more time, but the ant does not care as much whether or not it takes too much time climbing up the stem. It eventually learns its lesson that it must be aware of upcoming thorns and what it has to do to avoid them, or else it will get hurt.

We can draw many parallels and learn a few important lessons from our ant. The world, as God created it, is littered with thorns, much like the rose's stem. These thorns are sins, either

directly or indirectly. Examples include things as serious as war, crime, and racism and things as comparatively trivial as dishonesty, laziness, and indifference. These things exist outside of us as individuals and are established facts about our world and the way people live their lives. We each have our own goals, our own rose petals, and our own heaven. Greed, both conscious and subconscious, often leads us to temptation. It drives us to cut corners and cheat ourselves and others in an effort to get there as quickly as possible. But we end up pricking ourselves on these thorns, both as individuals and collectively as a people, when we become impatient and take the easy way out instead of doing what's right. If you look at the histories of war and crime, the large majority of both occurred because of greedy people who wished to cut a corner. We can live our lives the right way, the way God set out for us, if we are not impatient and greedy. It would be great if we could take our journey to something better by the shortest distance as the crow flies, but we can't. We must get to that place as the ant crawls up the rose, which is the only way we can. As a consequence, we must be deliberate in our actions and aware of what happens as a byproduct. We must be able to take those additional steps, even if it may seem like a waste of time in the short run. Most importantly, however, we must be able to learn from our mistakes so we can adapt to God's path and make overall progress as a people. The ant is able to adapt after a couple of thorns and learns to avoid the temptation of going straight up the stem. This we know. What we should be asking ourselves is this: can we learn to avoid those temptations? How many thorns will it take us to adapt?