

The Christian life, the priesthood, and cactus.



A cactus blooming in the middle of a hot summer, Aug 8, 2015.

The days recently have been over a hundred degrees. I watered this neglected cactus for the first time in many months. The ground in the small pot was dry and hard. Even for a desert cactus accustomed to drought, it looked pretty straggly. In a day, it bloomed with beautiful and delicate appearing yellow flowers. Even the flowers of cactus are tough; these flowers may endure for several weeks.

This is why I love cactus. I want only cactus at my funeral, with no cut flowers, unless the cactus (or Agave) is flowering. (In the latter case, I hope we build our new temple before I die, since the ceilings are not high enough now!)

Cactus just grows. If there is water, it flowers. Otherwise, it endures. It does not complain; it is not finicky; it is not easily killed. In the wild it grows in inhospitable and rugged territory. During much of its life, it does not look impressive, just dangerous, but there is always vigorous life, and beauty within.

I collect cactus from all over Texas, when I travel, for prison ministry or camps. I have a machete under my seat and a 12 inch bowie knife too, for such a purpose. I plant it in discarded containers, or behind our fence. I mix my own soil for it, basically an unscientific combination of about a third each of decomposed granite, compost, and dirt.

I do not know what I am doing, but it grows. It rewards my effort. It constantly reminds me of my priesthood, because although I most often know what I am doing, and I am often laboring in dry and

hard packed soil. I am not able to do many things required of me, and am out of my depth when confronting the spiritual problems of man, and even so, the bloom comes.

I am like cactus.

I am a bit prickly, and I have beauty packaged in a plain wrapper, as does cactus. I am a bit unkempt and do not observe all social rules. I do not suffer fools gladly; neither does cactus. I am a sinner, but also a struggler, and when there is water, I bloom, when it is dry, I endure. Cactus teaches me to stop thinking, and to pray. There is always much waiting in the Christian life, and especially the priesthood. Often, things are not that pretty. The bloom will always come, and it will be unexpected.

I need to be more like cactus. I also need to gather more cactus!

Priest Seraphim Holland 2015 [St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](#)

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