

(Alendro): (Story) *Facing the storm*

A few years ago, when the consumerist attitude had not yet crept in, care and concern was still prevalent in human hearts. It was at that time, that a man named Noel was living on the outskirts of the city. Next to his house was a small park that was tended by the local authorities. There were beautiful trees planted in the park. Although the trees were obstructing his view, he did not mind it; he was one with nature.

The children, too, loved to come to that place to play, with all the butterflies, the birds and the beautiful scenery around. It was a pollution free zone. The authorities of that colony made sure that only bicycles were allowed to ply through. There was also a jogging space for all those who wanted. In other words, it was a place of blissful harmony.

Now one day, Noel was called by the local authorities. They were the ones who looked after the maintenance of the park near his house. In order to create some awareness about environmental conservation, they had decided to have a small function and, therefore, they invited Noel, to plant a sapling, since he was enthusiastic about nature. He planted a banyan sapling that day. Now Noel used to jog there every day and watch his plant grow. Many people who saw him jogging in the park began to wonder, why he always said, "Hi, Ben!" to no one in particular. One lady asked him what the meaning of that was, and he casually replied, "It's just Ben. The banyan tree." They had a good laugh.

Now, as time passed, Noel grew really fond of the tree and the tree knew that Noel was speaking to him. Noel watched with pride as Ben grew tall, soon beating his own height and even looking down on him, so much so, that Noel had to lift his head high up to wish him every morning.

And life was peaceful in the park. Adults and children used to come and enjoy the scenic beauty and calmness of the place. Everyone enjoyed each other's company. On picnic days there was a lot of hustle and bustle around the place. The trees and birds, too, enjoyed the crowd so much that they became talkative

among themselves and when the place was empty and silent, they feigned to be in despair and suffering. Noel's bonding with the tree, too, increased and thus life was bliss for all, in and around the park.

But, all of a sudden there was a terrible storm. The storm lashed the city and the park. After two months when Noel entered the park, he saw no sign of Ben, "Where is my Ben?" he asked the gardener in despair and gloom. The gardener looked kindly at him and knew that he had a bonding with that tree. "Ben got hit during the storm," the gardener answered. Noel found it difficult to believe, how a banyan tree could just fall like that. With a heavy heart he exclaimed, "He's now dead!" and he walked over and looked at poor Ben. With twenty feet of his slim trunk and skinny branches lying on the ground, he was a lifeless withering body with dying leaves; Noel bid him a final farewell.

Tears welled up in Noel's eyes. But, just then the gardener interrupted, "He's not dead"! and he brought out a sharp axe. Totally surprised Noel asked him, "What are you doing now? He's dead! Is that not enough?" And the gardener replied amiably, "I'm helping your Ben to grow stronger and hardier", and saying so, the gardener hit Ben's branches with the axe, again and again and again. Noel walked away, feeling quite bad at seeing his friend being badly mutilated.

The next day, as Noel walked into the park, he held back his tears, as he saw an empty space which had till then been occupied by Ben's cheerful branches. He walked towards the place where the tree had been, expecting a hole in the ground. To his surprise, he saw a stub instead, "What's this?" he asked the gardener. "Your Ben", replied the gardener patiently, "he's been shorn, pruned and is now ready to face the world!" Getting irritated Noel asked, "How can he face the world like this?" "Wait and see", was the gardener's reply and saying so he went to tend another plant.

Due to the rains, and also due to his trip out of the city, Noel was unable to visit the park. One fine morning, however, as he came, he grinned to himself. The appearance of his tree had changed! Ben was squat, short but strong. Looking at the gardener he said, "Now my Ben looks set to take on the world". "Indeed! Indeed! Your Ben can now," said the gardener. "Without his silly, vain branches,

that only attracted the wind to hit him, even before his trunk had grown strong, but now that I have cut and pruned him well, he will grow much stronger and muscular”. Noel chuckled and said, “I now suppose he will be able to bear his branches’ better and frighten the storm off”! They both had a good laugh.

But the story does not end here. When they were silent, the gardener said, “Sir, the life of this tree resembles our own life; just take a look and think about it”. Saying so, the gardener left, leaving Noel in deep thought to ponder over his words. It was then that he realized that this gardener was not an ordinary one, but a spiritual person, too.

Noel nodded as he passed Ben and smiled to himself as he thought about the wise gardener’s words. He realized how right he was. Human Beings and Nature are one. Without a deep rooted spiritual grounding, without building a strong character first, all our other so-called “assets”, like a handsome face, a good figure or money in the bank, would only pull us down. To hold those branches together and to fend off storms and temptations in our life, we need a strong trunk. We should also allow God to prune our branches so that we can be more productive, effective and stronger. He is the Gardener of our life.

At that moment, Noel looked up and felt a gust of wind and his initial gaze went to his tree, “BEN”. But now it was different, Ben, stood there unruffled, undeterred, firm, ready to take on the next storm, and the next and next!

Sch. ALENDRO DA COSTA, SJ,

XTC, BELGAUM