

BONSAI, GKC, INSIDERS . . . A SPIRITUAL FORMATION MOMENT

From Suzy McCall in Tegucigalpa, Honduras

It happened on Thursday. I was at the airport with my younger girls and our friend Tomasa, waiting to pick up my daughter, Lety:

We were standing in line at “Espresso Americano,” where we almost always buy granitas. I was standing by, waiting to pay, when I my attention was diverted to a curious sight: a poorly-dressed man carrying a single, small plant was walking through the airport in our direction. Now, I go to the airport frequently, and I had never seen this man with a plant. I knew instinctively, though, that he was looking for a customer for the plant, and almost as soon as knew that, I also knew that I was going to be that customer.

Sure enough, he noticed that I was staring at him, and he made a bee-line for me. There were people behind us in the line, but he had eyes only for me. He said with a seller’s enthusiasm, “This is a bonsai tree. They don’t grow any bigger. See, this bonsai tree is three years old! It is finished growing. They are rare plants.”

While he was talking, I could see that Tomasa was terrified that I was actually going to spend money on that plant. She has no idea what a bonsai tree is, but that didn’t matter, either, since it obviously was NOT a bonsai. However, I was being filled up from head to toe with a smile. Just a couple of days earlier, I had copied these words by G. K. Chesterton into my journal:

“His soul will never starve for exploits or excitements who is wise enough to be made a fool of. He will make himself happy in the traps that have been laid for him; he will roll in their nets and sleep. All doors will fly open to him who has a mildness more defiant than mere courage. The whole is unerringly expressed in one fortunate phrase – he will always be ‘taken in.’ To be taken in everywhere is to see the inside of everything. It is the hospitality of circumstance. With torch and trumpets, like a guest, the greenhorn is taken in by life. And the skeptic is cast out by it.”

I sensed that everyone around me was wondering if the “dumb [greenhorn] gringa” would be gullible enough to buy this “bonsai tree” (branch? plant?). I cheerfully asked the man, “How much do you want?”

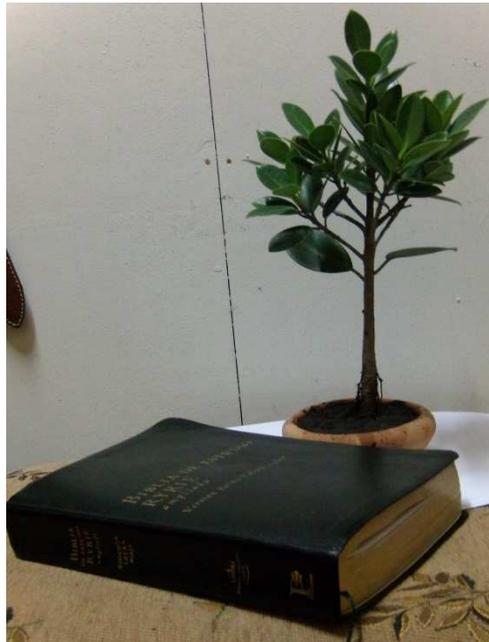
“Well, it’s three years old, so I’m asking 300 lempiras.”

“300 lempiras!?!” (the negotiating game was on). I began to make the big show of looking worriedly at the money I held in my hand, while making it clear that I wanted to buy the plant.

“Oh, I only have 130 lempiras,” I said, sadly.

“That’s enough!” he said happily, took it out of my hand, and practically ran off.

My children seemed nonchalant about the transaction. Tomasa was a bit embarrassed. The strangers in line . . . well, I don’t know how they responded because I didn’t look at them. I was too busy admiring my new “bonsai tree.” ☺



Backing up a bit in the story, when I saw the man across the airport, I saw a man desperately in need of some cash. I saw the run-down house he had left that morning. I saw the family members waiting hopefully for something to eat, or maybe a little money to buy school shoes. And while I understand that lying is in direct violation of the Ten Commandments, I thought the bonsai story was brilliant. And I didn’t respond enthusiastically to his story because I *believed* him, but I wanted him to think I believed him because to do otherwise would have humiliated him even further. He was a businessman, not a beggar. In a way, we understood one another because, as the years have gone by, I have asked Jesus to give me His eyes, and sometimes He does. I could feel, to a tiny degree, this man’s desperation, and the Lord actually gave me an opportunity to help!

I love what Chesterton says about how being “taken in” makes us insiders. It’s so true! It’s lonely, anxious business standing on the outside analyzing, weighing options, turning over the situation with skepticism and a fear of being fooled. Why not just be the fool from the outset? It’s a much more peaceful solution, and possibly more pleasing to God.

So, that was my favorite moment this week. I feel that many years of foolishness have now been validated. ☺