

BE PATIENT WITH CHILDREN
Fr. Varghese Pual, SJ

I was sitting on the veranda of my brother Jose's bungalow and chatting with my grand-nephew Jobin and grand-niece Rosemole. A farm house-like bungalow had a sand-spread courtyard around it. Outside the courtyard on one side my sister-in-law Rosily cultivated a rose garden. But right in front of us there was a variety of flower plants like marigold, sun flowers and coffee plants with flowers. In the farm outside the bungalow Jose has cultivated a variety of trees like coconuts, arrack-nuts, jack fruits and creepers like paper. There were also some coffee and banana plants.

The greenery outside the bungalow attracted a lot of birds. As I was chatting with the two kids a group of sparrows flew in and landed on the courtyard and they started to sing for us with their chirping. The children's attention was totally focused on the sparrows.

"Jobin, you please count the number of sparrows in our country," I told four and a half year old Jobin. "Usually they are in groups of 5 or 7," I added.

"One, two, three.... there are five sparrows," Jobin said.

"There are five sparrows", three year old Rosemole repeated what her brother had said.

Just then the mother sparrows made a long drawn out chirping sound calling the baby sparrows; and all of them flew up to the branches of a close by tree.

"Jobin and Rosemole, did you both hear the mother sparrow calling her babies? Did you see that they all flew together and settled on the branches of that tree?"

"We heard the chirping of a sparrow and saw them all flying up together. But, uncle, how do you know that the mother sparrow called her babies and told them to fly up to that tree?" Jobin asked me.

"Mother sparrow raised her voice and made a particular chirping sound and told her babies, hurry up, fly up with me to the branches of that tree; an enemy has appeared at the corner" I interpreted sparrows' language

"But who is the enemy of the sparrows? we have not thrown any stone at them," Jobin asked.

"The sparrows have no enemy. But see our cat at that corner of the court yard. When the cat appeared there, the mother sparrow got frightened," I explained.

"Yes, one sparrow may have seen the cat and made chirping noise. But all sparrows cannot see the cat at that corner. How come that they all flew together?" Jobin was curious to know.

"The sparrows love each other very much. So when the watchful mother sparrow saw the cat, she called her babies and told them about the cat," I said with a serious face to Jobin and Rosemole.

"Uncle, do you love the sparrows? Do you understand the language of the sparrows?" Jobin wanted to know.

“I love very much not only the sparrows but also all other birds, the trees, the plants and flowers, the grass and the river and everything on earth,” I told Jobin.

“Then, uncle, do know the language of this colourful plants and the flowers?” Jobin asked me endless questions.

“Yes, yes. I understand a little bit the language of the flowers, plants, trees and the whole nature,” I answered Jobin.

“Then, Uncle, what do the sunflower says?” Rosemole who was listening to me like her brother, asked me.

“Do you like the sunflower? Let us go near it and listen to what the flower says,” I said and both the children came with me to the close by flower garden.

“See, swinging lightly in the breeze the sunflower says that I like children. The flower thanks you both for coming everyday here with your mother and watering it.” I interpreted the language of sunflower to the children.

“Uncle, what do these rose flowers say?” Jobin asked me.

“Rose flower says that, if you have not seen the face of your God, watch me. I am gentle and beautiful like the face of God,” I said.

We left the flower garden and took the footpath of the farm in front of the bungalow towards the nearby river.

“Uncle, what does this banana plant say?” taking hold of a long plantain leaf in her hand Rosemole asked me.

“The banana plant says that when I grow up I will give you very tasty sweet bananas to eat,” I told Rosemole in a way, she could understand me.

“Uncle, what do these pepper creepers say?”

“Uncle, what does this coconut tree say?”

“Uncle, what does this betelnut tree says?”

“Uncle, what does this rubber tree says?”

“Uncle, what does this jackfruit tree says?”

“Uncle, what does this pineapple says?”

“Uncle, what does this stone says?”

Jobin and Rosemole asked me continually questions touching everything they saw on both sides of the footpath till we walked two furlong and reached the river bank.

There was no end to the questions of the two children of my nephew and I decided mentally that, without ever getting tired, I would answer their questions with patience in a way that they love and respect everything in the environment.

When we reached the bank of the river, I invited my child-friends to sit there as I was tired of walking.

“Uncle, not here. We will go down and sit on a small rock touching the water”, Jobin suggested.

“Uncle, let us go down. Sitting on the rock I will show you small fishes swimming in the water. But, uncle, tell Jobin not to throw pebbles in the water”. Rosemole took hold of my hand and let me down to the river side rock.

The two hours which I spent with my grandnephew and grandniece without any disturbance on that day remain etched in my memory. I have learnt a lot from the two children. My answers to their endless questions were like bible-truths for them. So I had decided in my mind that I will tell them simple things with no lie.

On that day I made much patience my grand children understand that the languages flowers, birds, trees and plants are different from the human language and we humans cannot fully understand their language; but with love and keen observations we can guess their language to a certain extent. I believe that the parents, teachers and other elders should make the effort to explain and describe to children in a way they can understand things without ever trying to resort to lies and falsehood.

Children always ask a lot of questions. We should not attempt to stop them or ridicule their questions or discourage them from raising questions. Listen attentively to the questions of children. Never ignore them nor their questions. Always give them appropriate answers. Never mislead them or give wrong answers. Sooner or later they will discover the true answers to their questions.

In our dealing with small children we need to accept and appreciate their questions fully. Children understand the feelings of the elders towards them more than the elders are prone to grant them. When children are accepted with true love they will trust themselves fully to their elders. The elders need to have much love and a lot of patience to fully understand the children. The elders should be prepared to ‘waste’ a lot of their time with their children.

Finally, if the elders have no appropriate answers to the questions of a child, then he/she should be humble enough to tell the child that he/she does not know the answer but he/she will find out the answer or that certain things are beyond their comprehension as there are things which he/she does not understand. But never ever discourage children from asking questions.

Children will grow up clever and wise by asking questions and satisfying their curiosity in the right way. (Contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in & www.vpaulsj.org)

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