



Do you remember learning about the process of photosynthesis in school? I can remember sitting in Mr. Trapane's 5th grade science class when he touched on the basics of the photosynthetic process. Now, I am not a scientist, and while I do enjoy learning about scientific topics, I don't think that I ever will fully grasp the intricacies of photosynthesis. However, as I understand the process, plants using chlorophyll have the capability of taking sunlight (energy) along with carbon dioxide (CO₂) and water (H₂O) and, through a complicated process, create sugars which fuel the cells of the plants, enabling them to grow and thrive. I'm not going to dive too deeply into the photosynthetic process except to use it as a springboard to move us to the final result of photosynthesis for us- tomatoes and carrots and apples and cherries and grapes. As plants create these sugars and other compounds in order to thrive, they also, if healthy, produce seeds which have the ability to grow into new life and keep the plant species going. Many plants, using the sugars produced by photosynthesis, encapsulate their seeds in a layer of cells saturated in sugars, which we call fruit. Because many of these fruits are pleasant tasting, the plant gains a biological advantage when its fruit is plucked by animals or birds and carried off to be eaten. The seeds of the plant are disseminated far and wide by this process, giving the plant species a path toward future survival.

My guess is that we don't think much about this when we plant our seeds or buy our seedlings in the Spring and plant them in our gardens. We do what we can to help keep the plant healthy by removing molds and fungi and insect pests, providing water and nutrients and whatever else we need to do to keep our plants healthy. The payoff, for us, is when we can pick that first tomato or pepper or squash and taste the result of this photosynthetic process. However, that process is crucial to the development of the sweet grape or cherry or pea that brings us such joy.

It is the full process of photosynthesis which makes this joy complete. What happens when you pick a grape or cherry or tomato too early? The sugars haven't fully developed, and other compounds in the underripe fruit, such as acids and tannins are more pronounced. It doesn't taste as good. But that is Mother Nature's way of ensuring survival. A bird or animal will not readily carry off an unripe piece of fruit to eat because it doesn't taste good. The ripeness of the fruit coincides with the physiological maturity



of the seed inside. As the fruit ripens and becomes sweet, and acid levels decline, making the fruit more appealing, the seed inside becomes mature and ready to enter the earth and grow into a new plant.

‘Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12: 23-24) Lent leads to Easter as life leads to death and, by the grace of God, new life. This Lenten journey each year is a process of growing and maturing in the faith. As the plant takes sunlight and carbon dioxide and water and, through its own internal processing, creates the ingredients which fuel it and help it to thrive, we, during our Lenten journey, make use of God's word, prayer, acts of love, time of worship and other Lenten disciplines to convert Jesus' journey to the cross into fuel for our faith. This fuel helps us to bear fruit, to actively share the love and message of life our Lord gives to us. As this fruit is shared, the good news is planted and given the opportunity to grow in another, and the process begins again. We have been given the privilege of a mission, to take the life we have in Jesus with us to share with all others. Just as I don't fully understand photosynthesis, I don't fully understand cross and empty tomb, but I do recognize that God is at work in both. Our Lenten journey provides us with time and opportunity to grow and mature in our faith as we connect with the Jesus who has turned his face toward Jerusalem, toward the fulfilling of God's plan of salvation. With the promises of God working in us through the waters of Baptism, with the love of God touching us in new ways each day, and with the light of the Son ever present to give us the energy we need to serve and produce fruit we have the ingredients we need to carry the faith to the next generation, to plant the seed that will grow into the future. Plants need sunlight, carbon dioxide and water to thrive. We need the Son's light, the promises of a gracious God and community in which to share this good news for our faith to thrive. This year, as we witness our Lord's journey to Jerusalem, may God bless us with wisdom and insight, so that the seed of faith which we carry may grow and mature, and may we bear sufficient fruit in our service that God's good news may be planted, and the joy and wonder of what is to come, from burial to new life, be made known in us and through us, bringing with it the gift of life.