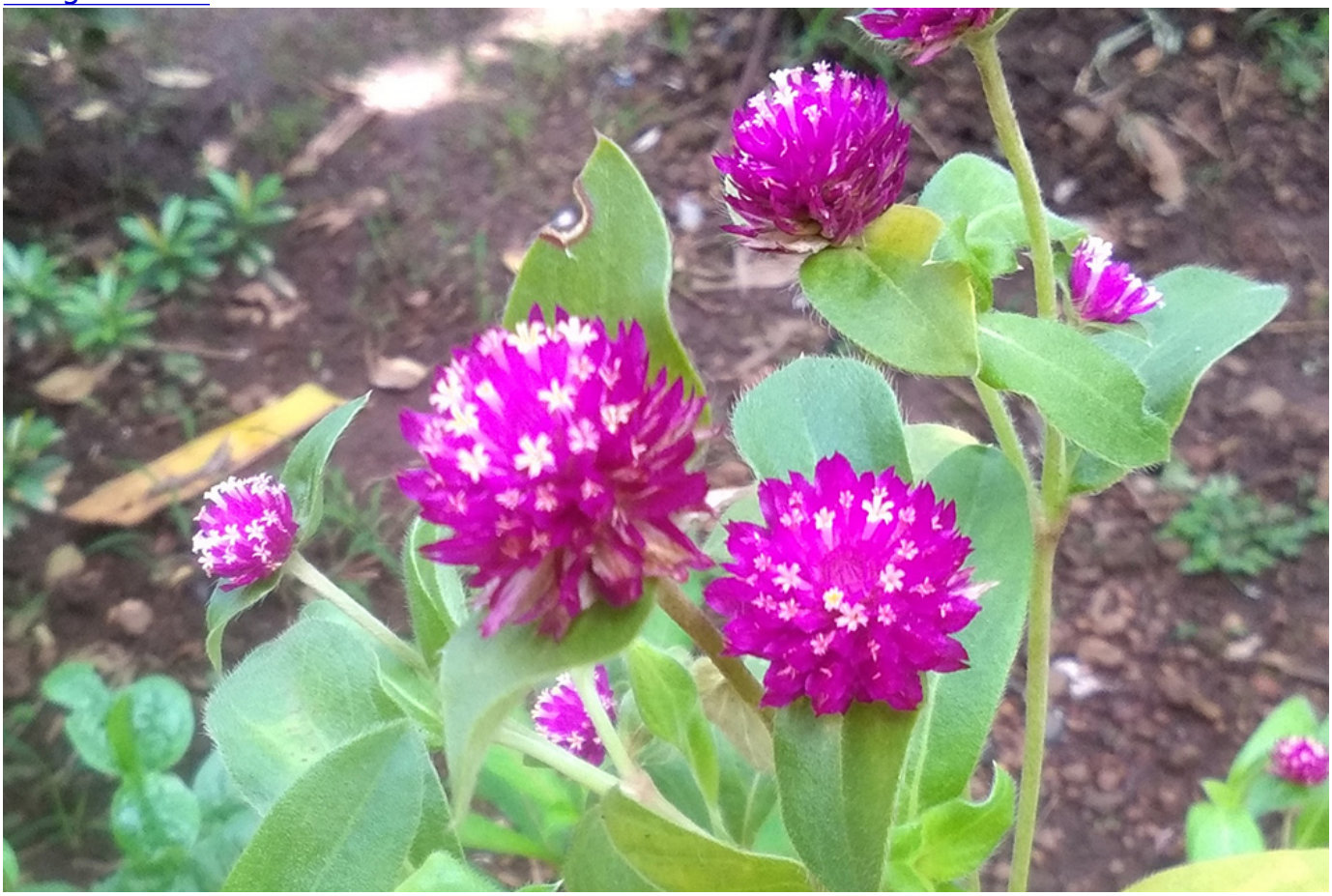
Columns
Religious Life



On her way to the chapel the author was suddenly stopped by the purple button flowers in the congregation's drawing room: "What surprised me was the tiny white blossoms within the purple bunch of flowers." (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)



by Lissy Maruthanakuzhy

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One morning on my way to the chapel I was suddenly stopped by the purple button flowers in our drawing room.

What surprised me was the tiny white blossoms within the purple bunch of flowers. Wow! Unknowingly I shrieked with joy and expressed my surprise this way: *Life within life. Newness within newness. Charism within a charism. God's creativity never stops. He is creatively creating.*

I felt overwhelmed with joy at those fresh tiny thoughts. I knew God was somehow mysteriously present there guiding my thoughts.

The purple button flower, a cluster of petals, symbolizes my community. The tiny, white seed-bearing flower now showing its head out through each petal is the symbol of each member, her mission to be keepers or protectors of the charism in the new social situation.

I am very fond of this flower. In the many years I travelled across the country, in places with diverse climates, I had not seen them in any of our convent gardens.

About six months ago while visiting another religious house, I saw the matured button flowers, brought some seeds home, and planted them.

Only four plants came up. As they grew taller, I transplanted them, leaving only one in the flowerpot. It became my morning hobby to look at them, and shift the potted plant to the sun and away from it. On one hot evening someone told me, "Your plant is fading." Quickly I shifted it to the shade and watered it. As the night fell, I found it was fresh again.

As I cared for this plant, I used to wonder if I am like it. Would there be someone caring for me? Worried about me? Sprinkling fresh water over me when I am tired and falling?

That someone, I knew, is my God. This experience connected me to something I was seriously reflecting upon those days.

There is a story behind this: We Paulines the world over have been celebrating the Pauline Biblical Year since Nov. 26, 2020; it will conclude on Nov. 26, 2021. Among other programs for the faithful and members of the congregation, as part of the celebrations I began reading the Bible again, from the very beginning. Each day I felt

I was touched by God's tender loving care. Bible reading became a beautiful experience. I could easily connect it to daily happenings in my life.

As I read through each book in the quietness of a prayerful atmosphere, I could feel ever more deeply the love of God for me and for all his creatures.

Psalms 23 and 91 became my daily prayer of protection during the hard time of pandemic. A favorite Bible verse came alive to guide and support me: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

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And the tiny white flower rising in the center of the purple button flower was a symbolic calling to me to be creative. Creative in my daily life of prayer, community life and mission. Creativity would give new vigor in these tiresome pandemic days and would be productive for our mission.

God never runs short of creativity or originality, and has gifted every human being with that creative genius in different measures. As in the Gospel story of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), each of us is given talents according to our ability to use them. And God watches over us and guides us.

I realized that to be creative I will have to leave my comfort zone and think out of the box, which may not be understandable to those around me. I also became aware that God has provided me with others to help me in the process. Each of us uses our gifts and talents to their maximum with the cooperation and encouragement of others.

But it also became clear to me that words of discouragement from others are also a part of my growth; I have to push to move ahead, focusing on the goal shining before me. Sometimes that helps me to search for newer ways of accomplishing the tasks of God.

The tiny white flower is calling me to give newness to my charism, the foundation stone laid 106 years ago.

Our founder Blessed James Alberione began from "Bethlehem," as he called the circumstances of founding our congregation … in poverty. Financially he was poor, yet he was rich in his vision; he had a small army of collaborators — priests, seminarians and teenagers — around him who were fascinated by his vision.

Servant of God Sr. Thecla Merlo, then a young catechist in frail health, became his trustworthy helper who absorbed his vision and mission at their very first meeting.

Blessed Alberione recognized in her the inner strength that would be needed for the founding and nurturing of a new congregation with a novel mission. Later she would exhort her daughters, "Give wings and feet to the Gospel," encouraging them to use the emerging new media for the proclamation of the Gospel.

She would boost any initiative from her sisters that was good for the proclamation of the Gospel, even when she did not fully understand it, due to her lack of academic preparation. She trusted them. She had the spirit and love for the Gospel, that would impel her to tell her sisters to always move forward, ever onward.

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Today the digital world is open before us. It seems to beckon us — like print media, television and radio beckoned Blessed Alberione in the beginning of our foundation — calling us to use them in the proclamation of the Gospel.

The digital world is the universe of the young minds today. They understand the language of the social media; it is a part of their everyday life, as online classes are the norms of the day since the coronavirus set in.

But often the young people fail to recognize the danger lurking among the smart appearances of social media, which can even snatch them away from life itself. How many lives have been lost through relationships established on Facebook, Instagram, and smartphones, that ended up in murders and suicide cases?

Where can we connect with them, and how can we save their tender lives, allowing them to bloom and give glory to their creator?

Since the beginning of my religious life, I have come across a quote in various writings of our founder. Blessed James Alberione kept the pioneer Paulines alert to the signs of the times with these anguished words. As our Pauline website quotes our founder: "How many times do you ask yourselves: where, how and toward what is humanity moving, this humanity that is constantly renewing itself on the face of the earth?"

To make our charism relevant, perhaps, I need to repeat these questions each day.

The tiny little flower is looking at me … reminding me … that there is an opportunity, and imminent action is required if I have to be of any help to the people of today through my mission.

It tells me to "rise and move ahead, like your founders … fearlessly, courageously."