



THE POMEGRANATE TREE

by Bro Mariano Di Vito, OFM Cap.

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Sacred Scripture is full not just of history and important personages, but also literally full of plants, trees and flowers from the most lofty to the most common.

The oak tree and the cedar of Lebanon that are symbols of greatness and majesty (cf. Is 2, 13, Ps 28, 91, 103), the grapevine, the fig tree and olive tree that symbolise the tranquillity of domestic life (Zach 3, 10; Mic 4,4), the palm tree with its evergreen foliage and roots always in search of water, that represents the righteous (cf. Ps 91). And then the sycamore tree, the almond tree and the great variety of different herbs, flowers and spices... that all confirm that not only did the Word of God descend into our world adopting the language of mankind, and then in the fullness of time assume his very flesh in all its fragility, (cf. Gal 4, 4-7), but also clothed Himself with the very colours, aromas and vegetation of our "sister mother earth." In the flora that is abundantly recalled is a tree, a little tree, and which I would describe of a simple beauty but of an also extraordinarily abundant fruitfulness: the pomegranate tree.

In my pilgrimage to the Holy Land last November together with some of my fellow friars I

saw many pomegranate trees with its splendid, large, vibrant vermillion red fruit, and whose sweet aromatic juice was very refreshing during the very hot days in the land of Canaan.

The wise men and rabbis of Israel see the fruit of the pomegranate with its many seeds, similar to precious pearls, as a symbol of the unfathomable wealth and perfection of the eternal Word of God in the Torah. And the Holy Fathers of the Church use the fruit of the pomegranate as a symbol of the Church that although one, is made up of many different members.

In Solomon's temple, as described in the first book of Kings (7, 42), some 400 pomegranates were carved in the columns, as symbols, in this most holy place of Israel, of the sweet delight in being in God's house and in observing His law. And in the Song of Songs, the comely face of the spouse is likened to a pomegranate glimpsed through a veil (cf. Songs 4,3).

This small tree with such an extraordinary wealth of meaning, symbols and evocations reminds and recalls to us the One who made all things and who, after having commanded the earth to bring forth vegetation and

every kind of plant and tree, saw that all was good (cf. Gen 1, 1 ff.)

In the globalization of our world into a global village the fruit of the pomegranate can symbolise that interrelationship and solidarity of mankind, that the leaders and more powerful must safeguard while at the same time defending the unconditional, incontestable and non-negotiable primacy of the absolute uniqueness of each individual person.

In every single seed of the pomegranate is found the whole pomegranate, and only within the whole pomegranate can the single seed find its place and stability!

May Padre Pio, who is truly a precious pearl within the bosom of humanity and of the Church, the mother of saints, help us, like the many tiny but united seeds of the pomegranate, to progress together and singly so as to be able to offer our own share to the world of the sweet and refreshing drink of hope and trust.

How many things can a little tree bring to mind!

I was forgetting, its botanical name is "*Punica granatum*."

A grand name for this simple and splendid pomegranate tree! ■