

The French word for Sunflower is *tournesol*, or literally "turn with the sun" and the scientific name, *heli* (sun) -*anthus* (flower) reflects that too.

A poem by Helen Keller says "Keep your face to the sunshine  
and you cannot see the shadow.  
It's what sunflowers do."

There are three ideas for us to think about today:

### GO!

Jesus said in our reading "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies .... It abides alone..."

The seed as it was has to go. It dies to itself. **What are the bits of you that need to go?** What is God saying to you today? Are there bits that don't please him? Lack of trust, laziness, lack of self discipline, maybe? They have to go – to make room for something better. Sometimes even good things have to go - to make room for something better.

In order for the sunflower seed to bear fruit, to mature, it has to die.

Today is Passion Sunday when we are remembering Jesus' death. He was completely selfless as he gave himself up for us. *We* need to come to his cross, giving up all we hold on to of ourselves.

New Daylight, 26 Feb, reminded us "When we grumble, we expect everyone else (and maybe even God) to change in order to suit our needs. It indicates selfishness and pride and it's the opposite of repentance, humility and a readiness to come to the cross of Christ."

This brings us to our second point:

### GROW!

As soon as we have planted a sunflower seed and watered it, it begins to grow – *it changes*.

And if you want to *grow* to *maturity* you have to accept change. *You* have to change & your *outlook* has to change. No way can you grow and stay the same. It is one of the most difficult things we have to accept.

If seeds are used for food they are sometimes roasted, crushed, even ground - it is painful at the time, but when we are refined and changed by God our lives can be more full of his grace and love and we can be more understanding and patient with others.

It may be helpful to practise changing outwardly in simple things.

Have a different food for breakfast.

Think 'yes' instead of 'no'.

Eat just one piece of chocolate and put the rest in the cupboard for another time.

In our Bible reading – if you usually read a long chapter, try reading just a few verses and meditating on them, or try reading a big chunk if you are used to reading a short passage. It only takes 40 minutes to read through the whole of Mark. Try a different version.

*We need* to be able to accept change – in ourselves and in life - if we are to consider ourselves mature.

My mother told me of a lady who often talks with her on the phone. She would have been in her late 80s at the time. One day she was saying how disappointed she was that she could no longer watch her favourite programme on the television. On being asked 'why?' she replied that the time of it had changed. My mum asked what time it was now, then, and she answered '12 o'clock'. 'Well, can't you still watch it?' asked my puzzled mother. 'Well, no,' she said, 'I don't watch television before dinner.'

We laughed, but actually I thought it was quite sad that this dear lady couldn't accept the fact that she was free to change.

A growing sunflower will be different every day — it will go on changing.

Are we willing and do we recognise the freedom we have to change in our attitudes, our thinking, our expectations and our relationships?

**How does God want *you* to *grow*? What needs changing next?**

We come to our last thought.

### GLOW!

There is a huge number of varieties and a vast number of uses of sunflowers. I can't vouch for the correctness of these statements but here are some of the things I have read:

It is good food! Sunflower seeds are an excellent source of manganese, magnesium, copper, tryptophan, phosphorous and zinc. They also contain very good amounts of selenium, folate, iron, potassium and calcium. They contain excellent levels of vitamin e and thiamin. They are also a very good source of vitamin b1, niacin and riboflavin, contain good levels of vitamin b5 and vitamin b6 and traces of vitamin c and vitamin a.

They are high-calorie foods as 100g contains 584 calories of energy. They contain high levels of protein

So you can eat them raw as a snack food. . – but don't eat the ones you have been given for seed as they might have been treated! You can eat the flower buds in salads. .In many countries the seeds of sunflowers were roasted and ground into a fine meal for baking, bread, or used to thicken soups and stews. Roasted and crushed sunflower hulls (the thin shell which encases the seed within) were steeped in boiling water to make a coffee-like beverage.

It is a fact that chickens fed on bruised sunflower seeds have increased laying power! & it can be used in cake feed for pigs.

When the stalks are dry they make an excellent fire; the ash obtained after burning is rich in potash.

Shredded stalks make good mulching material, silage and compost.

They were used to fill lifejackets before the advent of modern materials and made a light fibre for cloth.

I have read that medicinal uses included everything from wart removal, to snake bite and sunstroke treatment. Sunflower seeds help in preventing heart disorders, asthma, high blood pressure, migraine, headaches, indigestion and inflammations related to bones.

They lower cholesterol levels.

Sun flowers can be used to soak up radiation.

The leaves are used for smoking.

Parts of the plant are added to certain varnishes and paints due to their quick drying quality.

Sunflower oil is also added to detergents and soaps and is being tested for use in plastics, lubricants and even pesticides.

The American Indians used the petals to make a yellow dye  
Sunflowers are good bee plants, as they provide hive bees with large quantities of wax and nectar.

Each mature flower yields 40% of its weight as oil - fuel or cooking/eating & used to be used for hair treatment.

Face paint was made from dried petals and pollen.

The bold and exuberant flowers brighten up the garden.

So – if sunflowers are used to the maximum we *could* say they **GLOW**

How does the sunflower, then, compare with us?

The sunflower is not one flower, but a cluster of more than 2,000 tiny flowers growing together & they are available year-round.

There are plenty of stunning varieties in bright, rich yellows, deep orange, coppery reds and browns. Most sunflowers are bright yellow with dark brown centres, but varieties are now appearing with tan, orange, maroon or striped petals, and green-yellow centres. Some are even without the central disc, but are fully covered in petals instead.

They have so many abilities and qualities – like us together as church, and like each of us as an individual.

The apostle Paul said in his letter to Timothy – “kindle afresh the gift of God that is within you.”

*What does God want more fully expressed in your life?*