

HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected

7/23/2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

Vanilla and the Bee. Sound like a movie title, doesn't it? Recently, I read an article about the vanilla planifolia orchid, from which we get vanilla. "Vanilla" means "little sheath" and describes the long, narrow shape of the vanilla pod. This orchid, which is unique to Mexico, is unusual in that it grows as a vine up trees. Unlike most orchids, it blooms only one morning each year for just a few hours and then it wilts. And it is during this time of bloom, it needs to be pollinated or it will not produce the vanilla bean pods.

Hernán Cortés, the Spanish explorer and conquistador, who caused the fall of the Aztecs in Mexico, was introduced to the vanilla flavor by the Aztecs in the early 16th century. He brought large supplies of the spice back to Spain and introduced it to the king and other royals. Its popularity was immediate and quickly spread across Europe into to Africa and Asia. But there was a problem. The vanilla orchid vines that he brought back grew and produced flowers, but not the vanilla bean pods. Why? They didn't know they needed also to bring the bees.

The vanilla planifolia orchid has a hood that prevents the pollen from blowing from plant to plant. Instead, it can only be pollinated by a tiny, flea-sized bee called the Mexican Melipona bee that, upon landing on the flower, push up the hood, collects the pollen, and then flies to another vanilla orchid. In 1863, a Frenchmen studied the plant in Mexico and saw the Melipona bees pollinating the orchids. Now, growers learned how to lift

up the hood and hand-pollinate the orchid, the fashion in which the majority of the world's vanilla orchids are grown today.

The Melipona bee, it seems was made for this orchid, and this orchid was made for the bee. They were made for each other. When you think about it though, if they did not come into existence at the same time, neither would have survived up to today. The Melipona bee and the vanilla planifolia orchid were created at the same time, and it seems nearly impossible that the two could have evolved into this unusual life-sustaining relationship. Only God could have made this unique and, if you are vanilla lover, wonderful union. This is not to say that evolution is not one of the methods by which God continues to create today, but vanilla and the bee appears to almost stand in contrast to the evolutionary process.

Today, vanilla is the second-most expensive spice on earth, just behind saffron. But the Melipona bee is nearing extinction. Were it not for human hand-pollination, vanilla orchids would be facing extinction as well. Ongoing research seeks to find self-sustaining methods to cultivate the vanilla bean orchid, but the most natural way of pollination is at great risk.

So, when you enjoy that delightful flavor of vanilla in ice cream, a beverage, or in some other way, be sure to thank God for creation, and especially a little bee and an unusual orchid.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey