

Epiphany - 2023

The Parable of the Birds

Do you remember Louis Cassels' famous parable of the birds? It was Christmas Eve and the man's wife and children were getting ready to go to church. He wasn't going. "I simply can't understand what Christmas is all about, this claim that God became man," he told his wife.

It had been snowing all day and it was beginning to snow harder as the man's family rode off to church without him. He drew a chair up to the fireplace and began to read his newspaper.

A few minutes later, there was a thudding sound at the kitchen window. When he went to investigate, he found a flock of birds out in the back yard. They had been caught in the storm, and in a desperate search for shelter, were trying to fly through the kitchen window. He was a very kind man so he tried to think of something he could do so the birds wouldn't freeze. "The barn!" he thought. That would be a nice shelter.

He put on his coat and overshoes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn and opened the door wide and turned on the light. But the birds didn't come in. Food will bring them in he thought. So he hurried back to the house for bread crumbs which he sprinkled on the snow to make a trail to the barn.

But the birds ignored the bread crumbs and continued to flop around helplessly in the snow. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around waving his arms. They scattered in every direction except into the warm, lighted barn. "They find me a strange and terrifying creature," he said to himself, "and I can't seem to think of any way to let them know they can trust me." Puzzled and dismayed, he pondered this thought, "If only I could be a bird myself for the moment, perhaps I could lead them to safety." If only I could be a bird myself . . . Just then the church bells began to ring, pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. The man stood silently for a minute, then sank to his knees in the snow.

"Now I understand," he whispered as he lifted his gaze to the sky. "Now I see why You had to become man." (by Louis Cassels from *The Parable of the Birds*)

The triple reactions:

The Epiphany can be looked on as a symbol for our pilgrimage through life to Christ. The feast invites us to see ourselves in the Magi - a people on a journey to Christ. Today's Gospel also tells us the story of the encounter of the Magi with the evil King Herod. This encounter demonstrates three reactions to Jesus' birth,

- a) Hatred: a group of people headed by Herod planned to destroy Jesus;
- b) Indifference: another group, composed of priests and scribes, ignored Jesus;
- c) Adoration: the members of a third group — shepherds and the magi — adored Jesus and offered themselves to Him.

Three kings in a school Christmas play:

I read this story about high school students who were putting on a Christmas play which they themselves had written. In the afternoon before the play's performance, the students suddenly realized that they had forgotten all about the three kings in the story. The director of the play hit upon the following solution: he would phone three people at random and ask them if they would stand in for the three kings. All they had to do was this: bring along some gift which was especially meaningful to them and then explain in their own words why they had chosen that gift.

The first of the three kings was a fifty-year-old father of five. He worked for the town council. He brought along a pair of crutches and explained: "Some years ago I was in a head-on collision on the highway. I spent many months in the hospital with broken bones. No one was sure that I would ever walk again. But I tried and tried and used these crutches for weeks. During that time my whole attitude changed: I became happy and grateful for every little daily success. I learned to take nothing for granted. I bring these **crutches as a symbol of my personal thanks to God.**"

The second of the three kings was really a queen, a mother of two children. She brought along a bundle of diapers and baby clothes. She explained: "I was very happy and successful as a graphic artist. Then I got married and the bottom fell out of my life. My husband did not want me to work anymore. All he wanted me to do was stay at home and take care of the house. Then along came the babies and they needed me. But after they grew up, I was again lost.... until I began to put my talents to work in creative art classes for children. **I bring along this bundle of baby things to show that it was the little ones, the babies, who brought a new meaning into my life. I feel that by working and helping in their little world I am bettering the whole family of mankind.**"

The third king was a young teenager. All he brought along was a blank piece of paper. He laid it before the Infant Jesus in the crib and explained: "I was not even sure whether I should come here or not... My hands are empty; I have nothing to give. In my heart I long for success and a meaning for my life. I am filled with doubts and questions and unrest. My future looks foggy and unclear to me. **I lay this empty sheet of paper before You, Child in the crib and ask You to bring me an answer to some of my problems. I feel empty on the inside but my heart is open and receptive.**" (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).