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Pastoral Nature Notes
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Bluebird Easter Food!

One day this past week I was visiting my parents where we have hosted bluebirds for many years. I remember as a boy helping Dad put up our first bluebird house. As I was watching this year's pair, the male was sitting on the clothesline and the female in the cherry tree. The male spotted a large insect. He quickly fluttered down from his clothesline perch to nab the large insect. After he secured it he flew to the cherry tree where he fed it to his mate. I have also observed cardinals doing this very same thing. The pair will feed at the feeder together the female will crack a seed for herself and eat it while the male is cracking a seed as soon as she eats her seed, he gives her his. The male cardinal would give her about every other seed. Female birds have to eat considerably more food, especially food high in protein, to be able to generate their eggs. I read in a Ducks Unlimited magazine a few years ago that a hen mallard has to eat approximately 24,000 invertebrates (insects are invertebrates) to produce just one egg. Now we know why there are so many mosquitos! I digress! Scientists are not sure if the male bluebird does this for courtship or for nutrition. We of course, know that the answer is probably both because birds can sense emotion and they also have instinctual knowledge of what needs to be done. Strict evolutionists would say that the male bird does this just to be sure that his genetics are passed on. This is true, but it is not the entire picture.

Saint John Paul II wrote of the Theology of the Body, in which he wrote about how as human beings written into our nature is the ability to give of ourselves particularly in Marriage in both the natural and the supernatural arenas. I realize this is a very simple summary of his complex Theology of the Body but it is very relevant to mention, because what the practice of these small feathery creatures' reveal is an aspect of what I will call the Theology of Nature; of which we are a part. What these male bluebirds reveal by feeding their mates know from their instinctual knowledge, at the level of nature outside our backdoor, is the truth of what Jesus and the Sacred Scripture reveals and Saint John Paul II articulates.

The permissiveness in human relationships of recent decades is rooted in the premise that we are just like animals so we should be able to act like them. While that is true on many levels this premise misses to point because for example birds in this case, our cousins as living beings so to speak, reveal that there is a higher way to live than the permissiveness of selfishness. There is no new life where beings are completely selfish and self-driven.

To find the symbolism in this feathery example we not have to look very far. Notice How elegantly the male is colored! He shows himself off! He is the strong one the one who chases the sparrows away from the nest box. He feeds his mate and protects her while she incubates the eggs, he helps feed the young, and he carries their feces sacs from the nest. The female, she builds the nest while the male defends the territory, she eats much so as to bear the eggs, and she warms them to hatching and after. With their specialties the male and female bluebird complement each other and they raise two or three families a year!

This little reality reveals to us how we as a part of nature are called to live. Christ is like the male bluebird who goes to defend us against sin and temptation. He goes to carry our sins away on the cross. He also nourishes us in that very same action as he dies on the cross, he nourishes us the Church, his bride, with his precious blood! This is the sacramental life of the Church which pours from his side in blood and water nourishing us especially with his Body and Blood! Christ is our Bluebird Easter Food.

It is this Easter food, the Eucharist, through which power is available to couples who choose sacramental marriage! At a spiritual level the married couple can more effectively live what bluebirds do at an instinctual level because Christ is there to nourish them. In giving of themselves for each other at all levels, spiritual, emotional, material, and physical new life comes! A family is forged. Marriage as revealed by the Sacred Scriptures and illumined by John Paul II is making a total gift of self for the good of the other. The profound reality is that this mystery is affirmed even by nature in something as lowly as bluebirds. Happy Easter!