

Look at the Birds of the Air

"Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Matthew 6:25-26

By Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

Our fascination with flight goes back to the earliest of civilizations.

Human beings have looked at the birds of the air...

- imagined what it must be like to have wings and be able to "lift off" from the ground
and soar up into the sky...
- many people report flying in their dreams (calm, delightful)
- early pioneers of aviation studied the anatomy of birds closely to learn their secrets...
- today there are many thrill-seekers who use hang-gliders and paragliders and, more recently, "wingsuits" to experience the closest thing to flying like a bird

Birds are also prized for their unique characteristics:

colorful plumage, hunting skills, keen eyesight, beautiful song, even their ability to mimic human speech.

As a result, birds have always held a prominent place in art and literature.

But it is a bird's ability to rise-up and fly effortlessly above the earth that stirs something deep within us...

CORRESPONDENCE OF BIRDS

The Scriptures are full of stories and references to birds which is our first clue that something significant is being talked about.

- doves are mentioned the most (Noah's Ark, Holy Spirit seen as a dove)
- sparrows and ravens are referred to quite a bit
- less often - owls, vultures, hawks, storks, herons and even bats!
- but eagles are exalted and prized the most, mostly for their keen sight
- strong imagery of eagles in Ezekiel & Revelation - strange creatures having the head or eyes or wings of an eagle)
- woman clothed w/the sun was given the wings of a great eagle

But the correspondence of birds is closely connected to their *sight*...

Many references in Scripture to the "birds of the air/heavens"

- all has to do w/higher thoughts
- truths or intellectual things
- spiritual affection for truth (AC 142)
- understanding of truth (AC 477)

Birds correspond to the ability...

- "to look down, to clearly see" (AR 626)
- "to clearly see, to attend, and to think" (AR 831)

And so we get this type of definition in reference to birds...

"To fly in the Word means circumspection and presence, because when a bird is flying on high it sees clearly on every side, and thus is present everywhere by its sight" (AE 282).

And:

"Birds that fly in the midst of heaven represent all who are in the spiritual affection of truth, and so think about heaven" (AR 831).

The Lord invites us to "look at the birds of the air"

Why?

In our text, it's because they don't have to struggle and worry in the same way human beings do, that is, they don't have to "sow" or "reap" or "gather into barns," and yet they are taken care of (see Matt 6:26).

Why don't they struggle and fret and worry like we do?

Spiritually speaking, it has to do with their unique vantage point...

- they fly above the earth, from that height look down below
- see things we can't see (eagles can spot prey from 2 miles away)
- they are "above the fray," above the noise & commotion of the world below them

WINGS AND FLYING

So we can start to see why the Lord invites us look at the birds of the air...

It because a bird's ability to take flight and rise above the earth corresponds to human freedom...

- the freedom the Lord gives us to "rise above" the limitations of this earth-bound existence.

One teaching explains why this ability is so important:

If there were no separation between our will and our intellect and if the intellect could not rise above the will (like a bird in flight), we would be unable to think (TC 588)

And so in the Scriptures we find frequent reference to wings and flying.

In our readings this morning:

"Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest"
(Ps. 55:6).

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19:4).

"The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness" (Rev. 12:14).

We're taught that "wings" represent the truths of the Word (AR 245).

These truths give our *rational* mind the power of "flight"

- the power and ability to rise above our earthly troubles and difficulties into the light of heaven (AC 8764).

- and the point of "rising up" is that we get a new perspective, an eternal perspective, on our earthly troubles & difficulties

This is why the Lord says we shouldn't let worry consume us as much as we do - we have a powerful option at our disposal (see AE 282:6)

THE RATIONAL DEGREE OF THE MIND

I mentioned earlier that eagles are exalted and prized the most over all the birds mentioned in the Word and that this is because of their *keen sight*.

Eagles correspond to the rational level of our mind (AC 3901:2, AE 281).

"To mount up with wings like eagles" is to grow in the understanding of truth, thus as to the rational (AC 3901:2)

"By turns the understanding elevates itself, like an eagle" (ML 495:2).

What is the "rational?"

It's not what we think - to be cool, calm & collected or "intellectual" or "cerebral or brainy"...

Think of the word, "ratio"

The rational level of our mind enables us to see the "ratio" between heaven and earth, the "ratio" or *relationship* between what goes on "below" and "above" us

The rational level of the mind is our saving grace...

It is our gateway to freedom, true freedom.

If we couldn't *access* this level of the mind, we couldn't be reformed or saved (see DLW 247). It's that important!

It...

- is the *highest* point of understanding in the natural mind (DLW 237)
- is the part of our mind that gives us the faculty of *understanding* what is true and good (DLW 240, 404)
- is the part of our mind that is *capable* of receiving spiritual light (DLW 247)
- is not our own, but God's gift to us (DLW 23)
- distinguishes us from animals (DLW 413)
- enables us to think and speak (DLW 247)
- is never taken away from us (DLW 247)
- can be abused, however, and when it is, a person becomes no different than an animal (DLW 255)

RISE UP

So now, with a full, working knowledge of the correspondence of birds, with an understanding of eagles in particular, let's consider the application of these teachings to our lives.

As adults, in one way or another, we are constantly battling

- our old self, our old will (defaulting to old thought patterns, old behaviors)
- besieged with regrets, guilt
- find it extremely hard to "move on"

It's frustrating because we have all the knowledge, all the truth from the Lord's Word we need...

- to live good and useful lives
- to put us on the path toward heaven

And yet...

- as soon as we hit an emotional trigger, as soon as our will is thwarted
 - negative thoughts and feelings rush in
 - and we get stuck, really stuck
 - and we lose our objectivity

This is when the Lord whispers in our ear, "Look at the birds..."

[PAUSE]

The Woman Clothed with the Sun...

- was given the wings of a great eagle so that "she might fly into the wilderness" (Rev. 12:14)

We are in a wilderness AND we are protected...

- *"protection while the New Church is as yet among a few" (AR 561)*

All of the evil, hatred and confusion we experience, all of the angst and hurt, keeps our eyes, our focus...on the ground

- shuts down our rational mind
- forget to look up

Evil and falsity become much easier to identify and reject when we understand what is happening to us.

Like a serpent, selfish, material wants and needs keep our belly on the ground

Hell seeks to persecute us, wants nothing more than keep us stuck here on earth, fixated on petty, superficial things... (ML 440)

The Lord is here to help us...

For this purpose, we have been granted the ability to lift our intellect almost all the way into the light enjoyed by the angels in heaven. This lifting allows us to see what we ought to will and what we ought to do in order to be successful during our time in this world and blessed with happiness after death to eternity (TC 588).

CONCLUSION

The flight of birds...

- feeds something deep inside our spirit
- represents the desire of the human spirit to rise above adversity
 - overcome the things that pull us down
 - that keep us planted on earth

Let us take flight, let us "*mount up with wings like eagles...*"

The Lord is working constantly, unceasingly, to raise us up

It is the Lord who gives us the courage to take a risk

- to "take flight"

It is the Lord who inspires us

- to go back to Him in prayer
- to go back to His Word
- to let the truths of this new revelation "lift us up"

For then we can think clearly and freely about the things that matter most...

God, heaven, love, faith, marriage, and family (AC 3901).

Then we can pursue our higher calling
- in service to the Lord
- in service to our neighbor
- purposes greater than ourselves

[PAUSE]

Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The everlasting God, the Lord,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the weak,
And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.
Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,

But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew *their* strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31

AMEN.