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Birdsong

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Birdsong

Except for mocking birds, which imitate others, birds all have their own characteristic calls and, for those that sing, distinctive songs as well. Those who study birds can tell us whether sounds and songs are taught or inherited, but for any of us who have observed even a little bit of avian behavior we know that each kind of bird makes pretty much the same sounds as all the others that are like them.

We humans have language groups that are distinct from one another, but if we sing, we often will use music and even words from other cultural and language groups. It might take some learning for an English speaker to sing a Vietnamese song, but a great proportion of us have an affinity for music that transcends national and cultural groupings. Even if we do not sing along with music of languages different from our preferred spoken language, we enjoy listening to a variety of songs even when we do not understand the full meaning of the words.

We can be grateful for the gift of music in our lives, for it often evokes feelings that occur prior to understanding concepts that come to us from normal speech or written words. Even birdsong, which we certainly do not understand as language, pleases us as soon as we hear it, before our minds begin to make associations with related or similar experiences of pleasure or joy.

The language God uses with us is often more like music than spoken dialog, and sometimes closer to birdsong than recognizable language. If we listen, rather than constantly talking and thinking thoughts "towards" God, we are liable to become more receptive to messages and meaning that are more akin to what we receive from a good song or a piece of music than what comes to us when we limit ourselves to waiting for logical responses to our questions or concerns.

God invites us to pray, which of course we sometimes do in the language and thought-patterns which are normal for us. And responses we receive sometimes follow the form of Scriptural and Liturgical texts familiar to us as well as in spontaneous images and linear thoughts that are according to our typical modes of communication. But God is not limited to language-related means of relating to us in our hearts. God's word, like music, frequently affects us without our knowing with our minds exactly what is happening, yet with certainty that we are being gifted and loved.

God's means of communicating love to us transcends cultures and ages, fads and human management, and all forms of language, sometimes moving in

our hearts through encounters with beauty, but also accompanying us mysteriously with unspoken but consoling presence when we suffer. Perhaps each kind of bird appreciates or responds only to the sounds and songs of those that are similar. We, however, though of so many diverse groupings, are all capable of responding positively to birdsong of any species, and perhaps encountering God's love for us in such experiences.

Listen to the birds; perhaps God has something to "say" to us.