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## THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

### Swallows and Pelicans

By Father Jim Schmitmeyer

I was sitting in the kitchen of friends of mine who live on a ranch in Wheeler County. I'd climb the steps of the back porch and knocked on the kitchen door. Martha welcomed me inside but, before doing so, warned me not to step on a mother cat and a litter of kittens camped beside a pot of red geraniums.

The cats weren't the only critters on the porch. Later, when I joined Martha and her husband Joe at table for supper, Martha pointed out the window to a bird's nest beneath the porch eave. In the nest five baby swallows cuddled close, cheek-to-cheek, their fuzzy heads looking like Eskimo children scrunched together for a selfie.

Then, all at once, their mother arrived and all the baby swallows, as if on cue, opened their beaks at the same instant to get their food. I turned to Joe and Martha and said, "Somehow, all those open mouths put me in mind of distributing Holy Communion on Sunday morning."

They laughed and so did I. But, if truth be told, there are ancient connections between our Catholic faith and our feathered, avian friends.

In Psalm 84, for instance, we hear about a sparrow who builds her nest near the altar in the great Temple of God. And, in the Acts of the Apostles, speaks of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in terms of a dove.

Years ago, when I served as pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Memphis, Texas, I was often struck with the beauty of one the stained glass windows in that beautiful country church. Up near the altar, in deep colors and elegant design, you'll find a window depicting a pelican impaling her breast to feed her fledglings with own blood. The image is based on an ancient myth and has long been used as a symbol of the Precious Blood of the Lord, a vivid image of the nourishing and sacrificial properties of the Eucharist.

So, the next time you happen to visit a farm or a ranch here in the Panhandle of Texas, be on the lookout for signs and wonders and reminders of God. For those with eyes to see, the mysteries we celebrate inside our churches each Sunday are mirrored in the mysteries of nature all around us.

Lilies of the fields, birds of the air, fish in the sea and donkeys with big ears. These creatures show up in the pages of the Gospel and they long to praise God in the world of today as well.

So, keep your eyes open. Don't overlook the swallows. And make sure you don't step on any kittens camped out on the porch.



