

**Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
**Day 29: All You Can Eat**

*For Reflection:* Don't you love Bishop Katharine's phrase "eternal hope?"

Although she writes about fish in this essay, I see eternal hope when I look at the birds outside my window. I write this after yet another late-winter snowstorm in New England, where I live. By this late in the season, we know how to prepare ourselves for the possibility of a power outage: fill the tub with water, stock up on logs, gather candles and flashlights, don the long underwear. And replenish the birdfeeders.

There's much to enjoy about being snowed-in. Scrabble by candlelight. Eating up the ice cream so it doesn't melt. The quiet that blankets a house when phones don't ring. And, of course, it's beautiful outside. Snowy days always make me recall a book my son, Ted, loved when he was a beginning reader, in which a boy and his dog made the most of "sparkle days." Sparkle the blinding white snow does, and glisten the icy branches do.

Today I noticed the birds. We have a flock of blue jays, and one of them, the one I've named "Big Daddy," scooted around in the snow, making a bird-sized indentation so he could get to the bird seeds the snow has covered. If another blue jay gets too close, Big Daddy's crest pops up long enough for him to squawk something intimidating in bird language so the other blue jays keep a proper distance from his "feeding bowl." "Make your own feeding bowls," I want to encourage them. "There's plenty of seed for all of you – didn't you see the bag break when Ted was trying to fill the feeder before the storm hit?"

As the blue jays fuss over the plethora of riches, little birds come and go, pecking seeds from the drama's edge. And then, one by one, the wrens, the finches, the

chickadees catch on. Within a couple hours, there are nearly a dozen little-bird sized bowls in the snow. While Big Daddy keeps the blue jays in a selfish and hungry uproar, the little birds eat their fill in peace before flying away to do whatever they do in between snacks. Even though the blue jays give today's white and gray a brilliant blue relief, it's the mousy little birds that give me hope. If they can be ingenious and generous, so can you and I. Even when the winter won't give up, hope is eternal.

*Suggestion for Prayer: Ask God to help you see eternal hope in nature. After all, it's God who created our world in the first place.*

## **Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent ther Love**

*For Reflection:* How can you read Bishop Katharine's essay and not think of your own mother? Like her mother did, my mother is spending the last years of her life in a nursing home. My mother was a deeply loving, passionate woman; if she'd been a color, it would have been a deep, pulsating pink, a color that played up her nearly black hair and alabaster skin. And yet Mom was never able to give love freely, I suppose because she had to work so hard to get love in a family where getting food on the table and staying ahead of the rent collector took up so much collective energy. So I've always been a little suspicious of gifts from Mom, which maybe is why a recent one crept up on me.

Only now, in middle age, am I discovering my inner Martha Stewart. A few summers ago, I discovered my kitchen smelling like peach cobblers and blueberry

pancakes and raspberry jam and red velvet cakes when I--shunner of the sifter, foresaker of the mix-master--suddenly took up *BAKING!* The surprise culinary trend continues, and I'm now asking relatives if they happen to have my mother's recipe for lemon meringue pie. Baking, the very activity I avoided by practicing the piano as my mother made pies—all the while reeling off secrets of flaky crusts (one tip: use ice water)--is somehow helping me come to terms with her as she lives in late-stage Alzheimer's, a disease a friend says we can hope is better on the inside than it seems from the outside. As I cream together the butter and sugar, as I knead the dough, I'm healed by memory. Remembering my mother by taking pleasure in one of her pleasures somehow helps me know her more clearly, somehow helps me be less clouded by the longings of who I wanted her to be. I only wish I could have felt this forgiveness, this admiration, this understanding, this acceptance of my mother (and maybe of myself, too) before our roles reversed. I wish I could have pleased her when she was able to know I was trying. When she still knew my name, I wish I could have known her.

***Suggestion for Prayer:** Experiencing the best parts of my mother through engaging in one of the things she did best gives me a sense of how God's love transforms the pain of everyday living, the mistakes we make, the what-ifs and if-lys. And the wishing, the yearning, gives me a glimpse of how God longs to be known. What gives you a glimpse of how God longs to be known? If you haven't received any such glimpses lately, ask God for one. And if you have, thank God for it.*

**Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
**Day 31: Gone Fishin'**

***For Reflection:*** Have you seen the BBC comedy, *Clatterford*? It's about a small English village big on eccentrics. No surprise to us church folk, these characters often meet up at the local parish. In the episode I caught, the Women's Guild is upset because they don't have a room to store that British essential – the tea trolley. So, as the vicar began to lead prayers for those in the parish who had become engaged (though, as he muttered under his breath, he didn't know any of them), here came two members of the Women's Guild pushing the tea trolley up the center aisle of the church. You can imagine the noise of clattering heels and squeaky wheels on the time-worn stone floor. And you can see the vicar's frustration!

Don't you love the image of Jesus pushing a trolley with divine sustenance for each of us? It's rather like Bishop Katharine's image of God fishing for us, isn't it? Luring us with what we need, understanding that we're not always easily caught, even though we'll find it so much easier to breathe when we're brought to the surface.

***Suggestion for Prayer:*** *What image do you have of Jesus coming to you? When have you felt Jesus pursuing you? How has it felt? Are you flattered, persuaded, frightened? And what keeps you from running into His arms? Ask this day that you may be caught by the loving pursuit of Christ.*

**Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent  
Day 32: Come to the Feast**

***For Reflection:*** Bishop Katharine’s question, “Where’s the abundance in your life?” reminds me of a father who had just lost his little boy to cancer. His voice choking, he insisted on telling me that “there are always water lilies in the swamp.” The neighbors who brought a Christmas tree because chemotherapy sessions gave the parents no time to buy and decorate one that difficult Christmas. “Because of them, we have pictures of Aaron and his sister in front of that tree his last Christmas morning,” explained the dad, “It’s the last picture she’ll ever have with her brother.” A nurse who stayed after her shift so Aaron’s parents could get to their daughter’s ballet recital. “She was only four when Aaron got sick, and it was so hard for her to understand why we didn’t give her as much attention.” The mentally disabled cousin who drew a cross on the bottom of the child-sized coffin. At that, both of us gave way to tears. These were the water lilies in that father’s swamp.

I listened to this father years ago, but even now, when times are tough, I hear his voice. “There *are* water lilies in the swamp. Without Aaron, I never would have known that.” And without his father opening my eyes, I wouldn’t have known to look.

***Suggestion for Prayer:*** *Who has taught you about water lilies in the swamp? Take a few minutes to remember what they taught you, and then thank God for him or her. And resolve to notice the water lilies even – especially – in the midst of difficulty.*