

8 June 2020
Pastoral Nature Notes
Father Joseph Backowski

Elegant Trumpeting Waterfowl

I wanted to write this nearer to Pentecost but the circumstances we find ourselves in prevented me. This spring, as in each spring, the waterfowl make their annual migration northward. I have noticed something different this year. It is a good different. It seems like there are many more swans around than usual. The largest of all waterfowl and I'd argue the most elegant. Their size doesn't inhibit them at all, in fact it makes them all the more wonderful! With their great white bodies and long necks, they seem to float through the air when in reality they speed through the air! Their size makes them look slower. As they fly by you can hear the gentle whistle of the wind through their great white flight feathers. Like many other waterfowl they travel in flocks and like geese they call to each other. Their song that is seemingly reminiscent of a muted trumpet. When they land, they are dressed as if for a wedding with their pure white feathers and their black bill and black feet. So, what can these elegant majestic birds teach us?

I have often speculated that if our Lord and the events surrounding our redemption had taken place in North America, the Holy Spirit would have descended in the form of a swan and not that of a dove. Their great size and long necks point to the eternal and endless nature of Almighty God. Their gently whistling feathers remind us of the quiet whispers of the Holy Spirit in which He speaks to our hearts. The swan's beautiful white tuxedo adornment points to Revelation 21 and the wedding feast of the Lamb; in which the bride is clothed in white. Finally, their song! In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul speaks of the events surrounding the resurrection of the dead. The sound of a trumpet and the Archangel's voice which will wake the dead! I can think of nothing created by God himself, more powerful, gentler, and more beautiful than the call of a swan. This sound, whenever I hear it takes me to the resurrection of the dead and Revelation 21 and the wedding feast of the Lamb!

These noble birds are reminders of so much for us in the spiritual life, especially of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the dead, and the great wedding feast of heaven. When we are blessed to see a swan, may we more earnestly desire these great eternal blessings.