

KNOW YOUR FAITH

By Lynne Wardach

In Thanksgiving for The Gift of the Eagle

Have you ever traveled somewhere by plane and have been fortunate enough to secure a seat by the window? If you aren't afraid of heights, you'll see the stunning birds-eye view from up there. While you may not be able to see each individual blade of grass, or even each individual person as we can from our usual vantage point on the ground, you can see the landscape as a whole and gain a new perspective and appreciation for the breathtaking beauty of God's creation. It is for the contemplation of this enormous ariel perspective, and several other reasons, that I believe God created the birds of the air.



The eagle, for example, has the enviable ability to see details at 20 yards away that we humans can only observe at 5 yards distance. He can see colors more vividly, even ultraviolet colors, and has a wider peripheral view than we human beings, so he can spot nourishment from way up high and dive with perfect precision to gather it up. God created the Eagle with such a gift to help us understand the abilities of such great minds as St. John the Evangelist and Theologian, who saw visions from God about His heavenly kingdom that others had never seen before while he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. He detailed these visions for us in his Book of Revelation in Holy Scripture, causing us to know and accept that there are many things that we can not know in our present human condition.

Be that as it may, scripture tells us that we shouldn't be content to sit comfortably in our present understanding of God, but like the eagle, we ought to strive to soar higher and higher toward an understanding of heavenly things, understanding that this is a gradual process.

2 Peter 3:18 - But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

While eagles are lucky enough to be born with such magnificent vision, humans must train to see clearly and discern the reality of God's will. How do we do so? With constant striving and practice.

1 Timothy 4:15 - Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

Baby eaglets don't just strike out on their own to learn about the great big world but remain in their nests, snuggled securely beneath the loving protection of their parents. Until they are a bit older, eaglets can't thermoregulate, meaning they can't adapt to changing temperatures independently. We all know that our surroundings may go from perfectly comfortable to frigid in a short period of time. As fledglings in the faith, we might also find ourselves in a heated spiritual conversation that is too uncomfortable to navigate without proper formation. Like the baby eagles, we should keep ourselves under the safe guidance of the rightful authority of the Church until we have "earned our wings."

Until they are about twelve weeks of age, baby eaglets don't venture even to try to leave the nest on their own. They don't flap their little wings until they are 10 days old. Like the eaglets, St. Paul tells us that we must not jump too quickly into lofty spiritual understandings before we learn the basics. Faith is something we need to grow into by seeking out good teachers in the faith, surrounding ourselves with the protection of the authority of the Church, and growing in holiness slowly and carefully, one step at a time. This process requires patience and perseverance, but it's the key to a strong and mature faith.

Hebrews 5:12-14 - For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Even once the little eagles learn to fly, their first few attempts are less than graceful, and they are always supervised by at least one of their parents, just in case the little one needs help.

Proverbs 11:14 Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

This guidance is not a sign of weakness, but a source of strength and support. Those of us who seek spiritual wisdom should happily accept the guidance of those more advanced, while those who have gained spiritual insights should look out for those weaker in faith!

We note that when the bishop comes to visit, he stands upon a rug with the image of an eagle upon it, flying over a city. The city represents our eparchy, and the eagle stands for the bishop, and his authority to act as that counselor and source of vision over that eparchy.

We thank God for the gift of the majestic eagle, a symbol of striving for new heights and perfect vision and for those to whom God has granted it.