

Creatures of Habit

Walking past the gable of my home last night, I noticed the first swallow of the season fly into a nest she had built in the apex of the gable last year. I had tried for several years to stop the swallows building nests in the apex of my house. I had used some suggested methods of deterring swallows from building nests. One approach I had used was to hang a used DVD disc, hanging on a wire, so that it moved with the wind thereby distracting the swallows. The method worked for several years until the DVD became stationary. Noticing this, the swallows set about building their nest. Efforts to try and deter them then failed. I had to admit failure and allow the swallows to be my neighbours.

I was amazed to see the first swallow using its inbuilt radar to make it back to the nest it had helped build last year. I wondered how a swallow could find its way back to a place, and nest in a particular house, in a particular area of the country. I began to realise that, as well as human beings, swallows must be creatures of habit. They didn't need Google Maps or a Sat Nav. to find directions. They used their own built-in radar.

The whole encounter reminded me of how we are all creatures of habit. Maybe this is because we are all comfortable with a certain routine in life. Somehow, that routine gives us a certain comfortableness with life in general.

From our waking moments to our sleeping habits, there is a certain predictability about our day because that is the way we like it, plan it, and are comfortable with it. There is a certain surety about being able, somehow, to plan predictability into our day.

This reminds me of something my sister does when she visits one of her daughter's homes. During her visit, she begins to organise her daughter's kitchen and sets about putting her own organisational system into operation. Later on, when my sister returns to her own home, invariably, she receives a phone call from her daughter that asks: "where did you put my...?"

I wonder do many woman love to multitask by, not only organizing their own homes, but, in many cases, that of their grown children. My suspicion was affirmed when a young woman told me about how different both she and her mother are with regarding how they organize their homes. The young woman said that she likes to organize items like aluminium foil, cling wrap and baking paper foil with the box opening in the right in her drawers. Her mother arrives, uses them, and puts them back in the opposite direction. A simple way of doing something organizationally can cause frustration and tension.

In my own house, when I am expecting visitors, my sister arrives with dusters, buckets, hops, cleaning solutions, disinfectants as well as a pair of rubber gloves to begin a complete makeover of my house. When she does arrive, I just leave and let her have free space. When completed, I return to the smell of a newly perfumed house. The next morning, when I set about preparing for breakfast, it is then that I notice how things are rearranged. My cutlery drawer has items in different compartments. Instinctively, when I put my hand in to reach for something that is supposed to be in its usual place, it is not. Obviously, things get rearranged to my satisfaction again; to ways and places that are natural and obvious to me.

I suppose a certain routine is reassuring but sometimes, we need someone to come into our lives who will shake us out of our routine complacency and start to do things a little differently.

I think God likes to do that at times. He keeps challenging us; inviting us to expand our horizons, perspective and trust that such stretching is good for our body and soul. Then, again, I hope God likes a certain routine as well; that he is a creature of habit; especially that that creature of habit disposition allows him to routinely offer us his love, mercy, forgiveness and peace.