

## Looking in the window

I sat in my favourite rocking chair checking email on a foggy and frosty December morning. It was then that I heard some gentle tapping on my window so I glanced up to find its origins. Was it someone coming for a visit and they wanted to announce their arrival in a dramatic way or was it a dead twig from one of the nearby barren trees hitting my window as it cascaded to its death? It was then that I noticed a red breasted robin bird tapping frantically at my window. Initially, I thought the little bird was confused by the windowpane, thinking he could fly through it or that he was hoping that he could enter into a warmer place and escape the morning chill.

In the beginning, I dismissed the encounter as the effort of a confused robin. Then, I thought about it some more. In the back of my mind, I recalled an old Irish tradition that I had heard of from several persons down through the years. One part of the tradition began to scare me.

In Irish folklore and mythology, the robin has an interesting part to play. Robins are thought to be helpful to humans, occasionally granting favours. St. Francis may know something about this because he was able to communicate with animals.

In the Christian tradition, it is thought that a robin tried to remove the thorns from Jesus' head during the Crucifixion, and that drops of his blood fell onto the bird and stained his breast feathers red forever. In another myth, the robin gained his red breast from flying into the fiery wastes of hell to carry water to the stricken sinners who were suffering there for all eternity

Robins with their cheery red breasts adorn many of our Christmas cards and decorations

In literature, robins feature in 'Babes in the Woods' when the little bird buried the children, who had died of cold, with leaves.

So, what was it about our pecking red breasted robin that caught my attention? In the back of my mind, I remembered an old Irish saying that if a robin comes into your house, it is a sign that someone there is going to die soon.

Well, at least for now, I am very much alive and I may take some consolation from the fact that, technically, the robin did not enter my house.

A short time later, I was visiting with my family and was told of the death of a family friend earlier that morning. On hearing the news, I thought about the pecking robin, seeking my attention. I told my family about the incident and they concurred with the tradition of associating a visiting robin with an immanent death.

Two days later, we were on the road to a funeral in Northern Ireland. There, I celebrated the funeral Mass with a packed church of over five hundred people. Following the burial, we sat down with family and friends to soup and sandwiches that stilled the chill of the winter air for a few hours.

On the way home, driving through the fog, my mind kept turning back to the window tapping robin a few days earlier. Was there a connection between the visit of the robin and the untimely death of the family friend? Or, was it a mere projection of an outdated tradition? I could be rather cynical about the possible association, or, become more cognisant of the gift of St. Francis Assisi and his ability to communicate with animals. Assuredly, I am not asking God to give me the same gift as he gave St. Francis. After all, I have enough trouble communicating with human beings rather than including the ability to communicate with animals.

So what am I do in the interim? Go on living each day as it comes without giving any further thought to the red breasted robin incident or will I need to head off to the doctor and have a complete check up to make sure that all parts of me are functioning as they should?

In the meantime, while I decide on my next course of action, I think I will keep looking out my window just in case...