

Wedding anniversary? Plan ahead: Bishop Walkowiak invites all couples who are celebrating 25, 30, 40, 50, and 60+ years of marriage to join him for the annual Wedding Anniversary Mass at St. Andrew's on Sunday, October 2, 2016, at 10 a.m. Family members and friends are of course welcome. A simple reception will follow. If you plan to go, please call the parish office at 454-6000 with the approximate number in your party. We shall advise the diocesan office for planning purposes. Congratulations!

An even better score from the Pray and Spray Game on August 11, is the fact that we raised a nice total of **\$509** for the Great Lakes Burn Camp in Mattawan. Those who participated in the game as both players and spectators are to be congratulated for the help they have provided by having an evening of fun for such a good cause.

Lessons from a walkingstick. While enjoying a few laps in my friend's pool the other day, I noticed that what I thought was a small twig had fallen into the water and was resting on the pool's bottom. As I brought it to the surface, I noticed an unusual texture, and then saw that the "twig" had light green legs which were too evenly placed to be shoots from the "trunk." Chlorine had snuffed out the life of this delicate creature, which had no doubt fallen from one of the oak trees whose crowns reach over the fence from the neighbor's yard.



As I carried it out of the water and took it to show my friend, the thought began to occur to me: Who on earth could say that the coming into being of such an insect was not the work of, at the very least, "intelligent design"? The very phrase is purposely loaded with meaning to counter atheists and agnostics, many of them expert at science, who claim that what we call creation is merely a crap shoot of unplanned and unpredictable accidents of evolution. Looking at the little "walkingstick," which looked enough like a twig from a tree that it certainly had me fooled at first, I got still another insight into God's whimsical and playful approach to creation, which we tend to either take much too seriously or to reject out of hand as unscientific.

Who could have advised God that the very best camouflage for a bug would be to look like a plant, or a portion of a plant? What strange accident of genetics alone could have resulted in a picture-perfect image of a twig, capable of escaping many potential predators? What are the odds that a series of genetic events could have at once come up with the walkingstick, *and* with the hairy frogfish, which



has a white appendage which it waves to and fro as bait for other fish which it enjoys for dinner? As well as with a host of other flora and fauna which show the human imagination to be rather stodgy and sterile by comparison?

Authors and commentators like Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens delight in mocking believers and their "pious superstitions," claiming that we humans have outgrown our need for an allegedly imaginary character like God. They rather remind me of a child who, having discovered that Santa Claus is a convenient fable with which we can have much fun, become hopeless cynics and reject anything else their parents or anyone in authority might tell them. If you can't see it, if you haven't experienced it, don't believe it. That poverty-stricken view of life deliberately cuts us off from some of the most profound longings—and satisfactions—of the human heart.

Even from the standpoint of science, something like "pure" Darwinism fails to account for not only the vast variety, but the *beauty* of the natural world and our human capacity to be in awe of it. Because the animals lack our capacity to reason, they can enjoy certain aspects of nature to a certain extent, but they cannot really *appreciate* them. I could sit with Coco on a deck overlooking Lake Michigan on a summer evening and be absolutely in awe of the glorious sunset. Coco can also see the sunset, but has not a thought to watch it. It stirs neither emotion nor response in her. Let a chipmunk scamper across in front of the deck, however, and Coco, even at her advanced age, is ready for action. Certain animals, like service dogs, can be trained to notice things; many sounds and smells which are lost upon us are quickly apparent to them, making them very useful to us. In particular circumstances, these animals might even seem to be *our* stewards; but those are exceptional situations in which their senses can be put to use by us, who are *their* stewards, in ways that are beneficial to both of us.

It seems that philosophers and commentators like Hitchens and Dawkins must fight the idea of God with all that is within their power because they suppose their own egos would be crushed if they were to admit that someone else was in charge. I imagine them, in a way, like pompous, stubborn little children, shaking their fist at the sky and shouting, "Who made *you* the boss of me?" And the truth is, no one did, because even God does not claim to be our "boss." Believers will often enough, in casual conversation, fall into the quasi-heretical language about "the man upstairs," or "the big guy in the sky," not meaning to deny any genuine divine attributes, but neither wanting to sound too pious in the midst of co-workers or fellow revelers.

"King of all the earth is God, sing hymns of praise" (Psalm 47:7). When God's own Word continually tells us that he is King, Lord, robed in majesty, Master of the Universe, and so on, isn't it rather presumptuous of me to say that he's not the boss? Well, when he has made it clear that along with all the titles we give him, he invites us to be pro-creators, stewards of his creation and his mysteries, co-operators with his Son in the work of redemption, his adopted children, and heirs of his Kingdom, it might be far more presumptuous—and inaccurate—to call him "boss." To me, it

always seems that atheists are fighting a straw-man *image* of God which God himself has not given us, and which he chooses not to claim. Even in the worst of times, I find faith to be a priceless gift, ever reminding me that the One whom I worship is both mirthful and merciful enough to adorn his creation with walkingsticks and hairy frogfish. And to make you and me in his image! God bless you!

Fr. Den