

A poem for my sons on their first Eucharist

by [Jacob Stratman](#) in the [November 7, 2018](#) issue

When the bird feeders lie barren  
for a few days, as I have forgotten  
to buy seeds or your mom wants to rid

the yard of the cowbirds and starlings,  
and they begin to sway without rhythm  
in the summer winds, the mourning doves

come, bound by what they pursue,  
uninterrupted, picking the lost seeds  
among the shells—these gleaners

profiting on the sporadic eating  
habits of the finches. Forgive me  
for not acknowledging the finches

as kind benefactors, the Boaz  
of backyard birds. They are not.  
They are messy and wasteful,

but we love their colors. Nervously  
pecking, like Tolstoy's Vasily  
Andreevich, the master in crisis,

the fat man with two coats, groping  
for warmth and the horse's reins  
in the growing cold and darkness,

the doves don't rest or notice the family  
of squirrels running circles or the robin  
who lands on the shepherd's hook, surveying

the yard, or the hopeful finches, one or two,  
back now, who perch for a moment

and peck at emptiness. These doves

are usually the last to leave  
when the cat comes, when I open  
the back door, when the leftover

seeds are gone. Is the constant searching  
for food a part of their essence?  
Should we pity the one who is made

to search? To be always in want?  
Is this mourning? Or is it hope?  
Waiting and expecting that seeds

will reappear from above by means  
they cannot know, and also below  
by a grace that is provisional?