

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?