



The Twelve Days of Christmas

At Christmastime the carols try to convey the spirit of Christmas. There is one carol which does not on the surface convey any message related to the great Feast – The Twelve Days of Christmas. However, when we know more about it, we understand that it conveys a remarkable message. It is more than a repetitious tune with lots of pretty phrases and strange presents.

From 1558 until 1829 the Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their Faith openly. During this period “The Twelve Days of Christmas” was written as a catechism song for young Catholics. The song has levels of meaning, one surface meaning that no one would object to and a hidden meaning known only to Catholics, in which each element was a symbol for a religious reality, which would help the children remember.

According to this interpretation, the “true love” mentioned in the song would seem on the surface to be a suitor but according to the catechetical interpretation it is God Himself. The “me” who receives all the presents is myself and every baptized person. *The “partridge in a pear tree” is Jesus Christ*, symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators away from the helpless nestlings. The pear tree resembles the apple tree, part of Adam’s fall.

So the hidden meanings of the other symbols are:

Two turtle doves, stand for the Old and New Testaments

Three French hens (beautiful and costly), the gifts of Faith, Hope, & Charity

Four calling birds, the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Five golden rings, five books of the Old Testament

Six geese a-laying, six days of creation

Seven swans a-swimming, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

Eight maids a-milking (vital nourishment), the eight Beatitudes

Nine ladies dancing, nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5/22)

Ten lords a-leaping, the Ten Commandments

Eleven pipers piping, the 11 faithful Disciples

Twelve drummers drumming, the 12 points of belief in The Apostles' Creed

This year when you hear “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, it will have more meaning.