

8 April 2020
Pastoral Nature Notes
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Thorns of Eden

An often-missed fencerow shrub that many people don't see when out for a walk is the Hawthorn. It is a large bushy shrub. It is native to the entire northern hemisphere in temperate climates and is a member of the rose family. When it blooms in spring it has bunches of vanilla ice-cream colored flowers. From the flowers, the bush produces small pome fruits that are bright barn red and look like crab apples. This shrub is extremely beautiful in spring and fall with its white and red colors. These red fruits are like rose hips and can be used for food. Don't be too taken in by the beauty of this bush though, in fact, **BE CAREFUL!** One of the nicknames for this bush is Thorn Apple! Does it have thorns! Wow! The thorns can be one to three inches long. Like many things for us in life, as human beings we remember the bad and rarely remember the good. This plant is a favorite of the Northern Shrike, a small carnivorous bird. This seemingly cute little bird is a voracious predator who despite his violent dispositions has very civilized dining habits. He prefers to skewer his food on a thorn or other sharp object thus using a natural fork of sorts. One of his favorite bushes is the Hawthorn because of its long smooth thorns on which he can impale his food. While it may seem that all of this is just the harshness of nature, there is deeper meaning here for us during Holy Week. It is most likely that it was the thorns of the Hawthorn which the Romans wove together for Jesus's crown of thorns. It is easy to see why. These smooth long thorns would have very easily been pressed into the flesh of our Lord's head and easily would have gone very deep. Imagine the pain he experienced just being crowned with those thorns. Many theological writers make a lot of connections with Jesus' Cross and the fruit tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden that looked so good for food. There is also a connection between that fruit tree and Jesus' crown of thorns, because of dis-obedience, in order to save us he not only had to die on the wood of the tree but he had to suffer the piercing excruciating pain of the thorns of that fruit tree as well. But as with anything the Hawthorn isn't just about the thorns, it also reveals the Resurrection. It reveals that from the thorns can come great beauty and fragrance in the white flowers. The red fruit reminds of Jesus' precious blood. When he was impaled by the thorns, not by a shriek but

by the soldiers, his beautiful red blood poured out. His blood, his very life, the life of God flowed out to give us life and to nourish us especially in the Holy Eucharist. As we continue to endure the piercing effects of the silence of isolation and separation this Holy week let us remember that from the piercing, the suffering from the thorns of life, great good and new life will come. Abraham Lincoln made this saying famous and I think it is fitting for the Hawthorn, for the Christian Life, and for our present times: “We can complain that roses have thorns. Or we can rejoice that thorn bushes produce roses! “

A Hawthorn branch. You can see how large the thorns are in comparison to my big hands!

