

# Hellos and goodbyes and other thoughts inspired by butterflies

Our first butterfly emerged while I was cooking a can of soup in the kitchen. The second one came out while we were at Mass and a picnic lunch. The third and fourth shed their chrysalides while we were at work and school.



Now we are waiting to meet our fifth and final butterfly.

Part of me wants to sit by their cage waiting for it to break free. This is, after all, our last shot at seeing one of these butterflies climb out of a chrysalis.



But my schedule doesn't allow for this. The magic may just have to happen without us here—as it has four times before.

Besides, if there is one thing I have learned this week, as we have waited for and welcomed our butterflies, it's that nature has things well in hand. My role is to be an observer and to provide a few flowers, pieces of fruit, and some man-made nectar for our guests.



For the most part, though, I am not needed. Somehow—and I can't figure out how—these caterpillars become chrysalides and then butterflies.

No one teaches them what to do. They just know.

And then they come out of the chrysalides, leaving the husks behind. And they are gorgeous.

They are delicate but strong, colorful on one side and more muted on the other.

They can be still for long stretches and then suddenly very active, flying and flapping their vibrant wings.



At the end of the week we will let them go.

“We should have a butterfly release party,” I say to Leo.

“Why would we do that?” he says. “We love them.”



Why, indeed, would we celebrate saying goodbye to these treasured little butterflies? But they will be ready to go. And, even though we will be sad, we will also be happy for them.

Today at work I also said goodbye—to a friend and colleague. He, too, has to fly. It’s hard for me to understand. I want him to stay—and so do many others. He is a source of strength to many, and over the past few years he has been there through some of my happiest and most difficult moments.

Still, he is a Jesuit priest and he has a calling that transcends my wants and needs. He explained it to me quite simply. The easy choice for him would be to stay. The more daring choice is to go.



He is an inspiration to me. He makes me wonder whether I am challenging myself enough.

With gratitude and genuine happiness for him, I wish him well. But unlike with the butterflies, I know we will stay in touch.

Besides, as C.S. Lewis said, “Christians never say goodbye.”