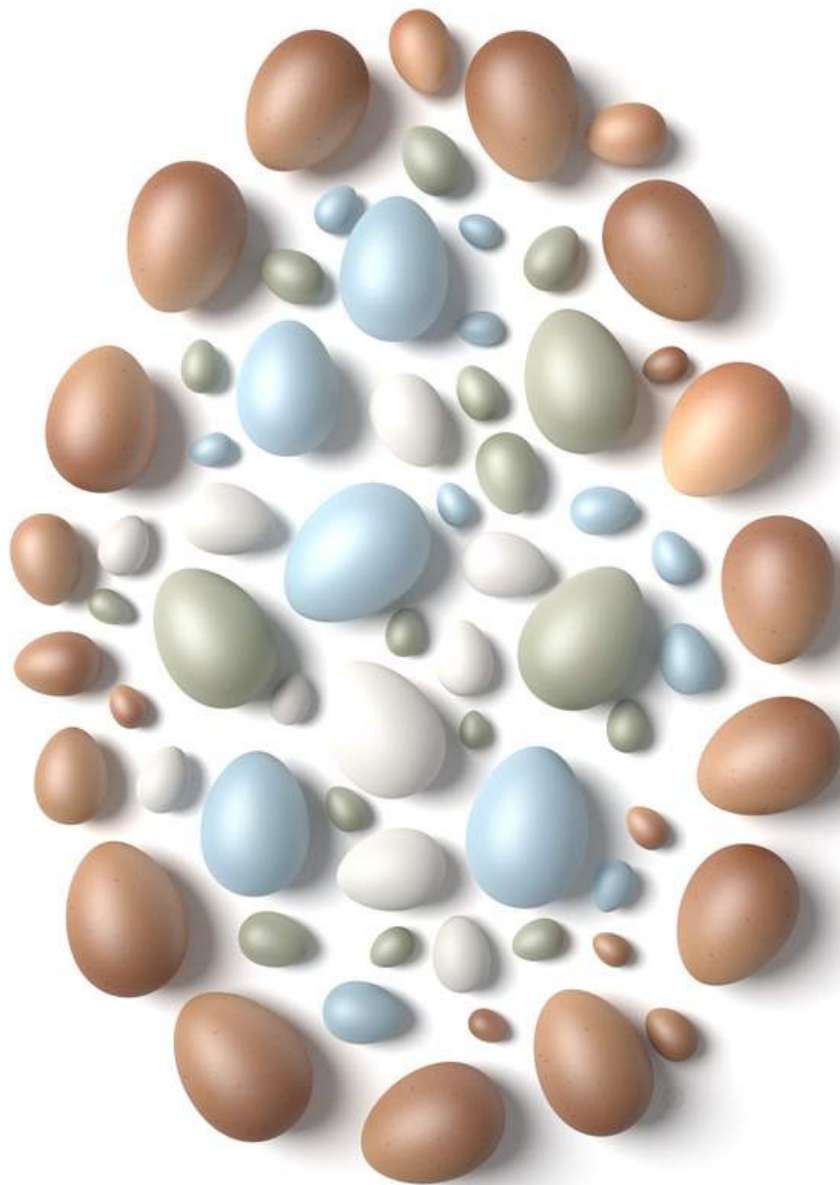


Fellowship & Fairydust



Life, Death &
Rebirth

A COLLECTION OF
STORIES, ARTICLES,
POETRY & ARTWORK



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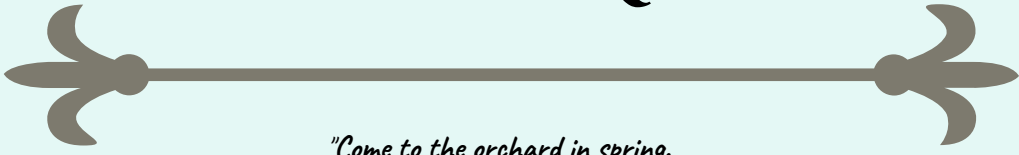
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Editor's Note



"Come to the orchard in spring.

There is light and wine, and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers."

~Rumi

After a year of great challenges, we live in hope that at last, our lives are gradually returning to normal as we see light at the end of the tunnel. In many ways, this does mark a rebirth of sorts for humanity out of the darkness of the pandemic and other struggles we have had to face.

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Indeed, leaving the cool darkness of winter more generally for the warmth of the spring season calls to mind the many stories that remind us of rejuvenation and a fresh start.

As Christians, we mark spring with the liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter – imitating Christ's 40 days in the desert through fasting and prayer, and culminating with the remembrance of his passion, death and resurrection. In the following pages, you will find reflections and how it has impacted the Christian faithful of all denominations, both east and west, for over 2000 years.

In addition, we also have writers of other religious traditions offering a glimpse into their own spring festivals and commemorations, including the Jewish Passover, and the Pagan Beltane. In addition, we have added personal musings which reflect the universality of life, death, and rebirth. Such reflections have a heightened significance due the realities that many people have faced during the times in which we live.

We at Fellowship and Fairydust hope that as normality resumes, that you may find something in this issue which has meaning for our times and in your own life.

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

-Gerard Manley Hopkins

Hope springs eternal!

**~ AVELLINA BALESTRI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
WESLEY HUTCHINS, MANAGING EDITOR**

On the Mountain Poems of Stonehouse: Assembled and Transcribed by Red Pine

Stonehouse (Shihwu) was born in 1272 in the town of Changshu, in Yushan not far from the mouth of the Yangtze River. The beautiful landscape of Yushan inspired much of Shihwu's work. His poetry was drawn from by his honest, simple life spent living with and observing the natural world around him, and reflecting on his place within it.

He was born into a family of moderate to high means, and so was able to receive a traditional Confucian education. However, when he was a young adult he changed paths, quit his studies, and joined the Hsingchiao Chungfu Temple as a novice monk under the tutelage of Master Yung-wei. Three years later he was formally ordained and given the monastic name Ch'ing-kung (also the name of a qigong/martial arts technique for making the physical body extremely light in weight by altering the flow of Qi).

Records don't tell us when it was that he adopted the name Shihwu (Stonehouse), but what we do know is that there was a large cavern in the area where he lived of the same name. The cavern was so huge that it was said a whole house could fit inside of it. It had a permanent natural spring flowing from its mouth all year long, and was surrounded by beautiful pine forests. It was common practice, at this time, for educated people to take several different names throughout their lives, denoting the different phases which they progressed through. Buddha, himself, had several names in his lifetime before reaching enlightenment and becoming Buddha; some of the better known were Siddhartha Gautama, Shakyamuni, and Tathagata. Each subsequent name was taken as Buddha transitioned from one stage of his journey to another. It is likely that Shihwu adopted the name Stonehouse at some point during his studies.

Following his ordination, Shihwu had many travels and adventures, but at the age of forty he decided that he preferred life in the mountains. He turned down a very prestigious post as meditation master of Lingyin Temple (100km to the south) and moved back to Huchou. He built a hut on the southern summit of Hsiamushan mountain and retired from the world to begin life as a hermit.

It was a customary practice for monks to beg for food from the local villages and towns, but Shihwu despised begging and chose, instead, a life of hard work and meagre means. He existed on stream and spring water and had a diet of wild plants. He didn't have much, but was known to be a very generous man who always gave his hospitality to strangers, and shared what little he had with those who turned up at his door.

Reading this book of his collected poetry, it is impossible not to feel a strong connection to this deep thinking and unique man. His poetry is a doorway to his day to day life, in all of its beautiful, honest simplicity. While I'm not sure that I have the fortitude or good health to live such a harsh life, high up in the mountains, this is the life that I yearn for in every fibre of my being. To be that separated from the toxic touch of modern living, of a society which seems to rejoice in the misery of others and focus only on material gain and becoming ever richer; what better existence could there be? This man was handed position and respect, and he turned it all down in pursuit of a truly enlightened existence, in a place too beautiful to be believed.

By Beth Amos

I would highly recommend reading Shihwu's poetry. It is a singularly illuminating experience, most especially at a time where we all face many forms of enforced isolation. Let Stonehouse's experiences raise you up and give you a different, Zen perspective on what we humans actually 'need,' versus all of the meaningless rubbish which society and big business constantly force upon us.

An Excerpt from 'The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse' ~ assembled and transcribed by Red Pine:

*"I made my home west of Cha River
where water fills Sky Lake and the moon fills the stream
strangers are frightened by the mountain's heights
but once they arrive they know the trail
dried snail shells on rock walls, fresh tiger tracks in the mud
I leave my door open when Spring days get longer
when paulownias bloom and thrushes call."*



Image: Original Artwork by Beth Amos

Note by Red Pine: Both the east and the west forks of the Tiao River originate in the Tienmu Mountains west of Hangzhou, meet in Huchou, then flow into nearby Lake Taihu. The last stretch of their combined waters, from Huchou to Taihu, is called the Cha River. As early as the Sung dynasty, the city of Huchou was also referred to by this name. Hence, when Stonehouse says he lived west of Cha River, he means west of Huchou. Actually, the mountain on which he lived was twenty-five kilometers to the southwest. Sky Lake was the name he gave to the small pond in front of his hut. Nowadays, it is also called Butterfly Spring, because of the shape of its two "wings," or Medicine Spring, because of the reputed healing quality of its water. Until recently, hermits in China often reported encounters with the South China tiger, which is much smaller than its Siberian and Bengali cousins but still dangerous. The paulownia is one of China's most fragrant trees. It blooms in late March and early April and is the only tree on which the phoenix will alight—should a phoenix be flying by. In the last line, I've read hua-hu, a compound not attested in any dictionary or database, as a copyist error or local usage for hua-mei: "thrush."

Palm Sunday

Well-Sanitized

BY LAWRENCE HALL

There is social distancing in Jerusalem
Mostly among Romans and Greeks and Jews
Who don't much like each other anyway -
How is this day different from all other days?*

This year there is no parking-lot procession
That's good; the timing of the hymn in front
Never matches the timing 'way in back
And the mail-order palms are sanitized


What hosannas this season, you may well ask:
Wave the virus and proclaim, "Wear your mask!"

*cf. The Seder

(This is only a bit of wry humor; good hygiene is always a matter of
caritas in protecting others as well as one's self.)

The Fox & the Lyre

by Ron Drummond



O'er the bright hills and southern green
He laid warmly in cover'd grassy mows
Play'd tune amongst the trees
The beasts of woodland crowds came to play
Orpheus, his song of high muses
Made the the beast of wood dance
The soothing song of a divine kiss
Sweet, as the waters bade in the Last Sea
The bard made his rest known to all
Sleep found him quickly after his playing
Deeply he dreamt, far and beyond
Elysian fields draped in a saffron robe
As he laid sleep, a fox approach
Cunning, sly, and swift the lyre fell beneath the foxes' feet
Into the wood the fox made his escape
With Orpheus' lyre between his teeth
As Orpheus returns to wake, he bellows a cry
To his father Apollo of his missing and lost lyre
Apollo tells of a cunning fox who took off
Swiftly with his beloved gift of muses wonder
Orpheus followed the counsel of Apollo
Sang he did, to the trees, to wake the daughters of Oxylus
Awoke, Maphenia, beautiful maiden of the southern mountains
Eyes of barken brown, hair of golden autumn shimmer
To you I give thee my favored kindness
Her treely branches gave fruit to the floor of the earth
Orpheus awaited for the cunning fox to show
For the fox to eat the fruit of Maphenia's branches
The fox approach the mountain tree
Below spread amongst his warm nimble feet
Maphenia's fruit, juicy berry'd delight
The fox fell at the bite, of her delicious berry brights
To him, Orpheus holds tight his lyre once more
One last song he play'd for the fox to wake
And once the fox rose from its short slumber
Through the wood he ran, shiny, his bright red fur



Flower Face

by Rachel Schmidt

You crafted me from blossom and brush
and expected me to sigh and blush,
but you forgot so many flowers
have such fickle thorns.

Beneath the shady forest bowers,
by the will of your powers,
I took first sweet fragrant breath,
and I thus was born.

But from those first fateful steps,
I was told: in life, and death,
That I was one shape for another molded,
sculpted, formed.

“You will be a young lord’s lover.”
“You will be a faithful mother.”
“Maiden, fair, delicate.”
From forest, I was torn:

To learn your courtly etiquette
in your world cold, synthetic,
and though you poured devotion...
I grew more forlorn.

So I hid each wild emotion,
cast away each wistful notion
that I could be anything besides
that which I was born.

But a hunter in my heart resides,
and he showed me where my true self hides:
deep beneath root, and branch, and feather
passivity turned to scorn.

And you call me beast that I did sever
my fate from you who were so clever
to give me life and give me wile
but think me content to be shorn.

So a beast I am, of tooth, claw, and guile,
in feathers cloaked, in deep exile,
and I will roam these nighttime skies
until I am reborn.

You shaped me with your clever lies,
tried to make me ideal shape and size
but forgot there is great power
in those from forest formed.



Witness

by Rebecca Godlove

I am His judge

I see just a man before me, a man and not a god,
But the flurry of squawking rabbis surrounds Him,
Their robes flapping about like angry wings
They insist, their many voices as one
That before me stands an enemy of the Jews
A blasphemer
A breather of lies
A stirrer of pots
An inciter of riots
A danger to the very soul of Rome.
So I look again at this man brought low
And imagine I see what they see
Still, I am not moved to rage
But pity
What fool would remain silent
In His own defense
When given the chance
To speak
And quiet the cackling of fat angry geese?

I am His guard

I see before me a part of the problem,
The mess, the plague of these Jews in my Rome.
Look at this, a god who bleeds
That's what they say he says
But I've never seen a god that bleeds
His blood will feed my family for another week anyway -
I'll get my three denarii tomorrow, but He'll be dead before then.
Someone said he was going to destroy the Jewish temple
With His own two hands
The two hands they're stretching out right now?
He won't be doing anything with those.
Those women wailing - are they his students, his sisters, his
lovers? My own wife would not mourn that way for me.
But she is good, in her work she is good,
As I am good in mine



I am His mother

You ask how I can look upon this,
My beloved boy in such pain

I say how can I not
I gave Him life

And then He gave me life

And so they are taking two lives on this day.

Please stop -

He never did anything to deserve this

Please stop -

Just give Him a moment to breathe

Please stop -

Let me kiss Him one last time

Please stop -

Please stop this, my son -

I know you can stop this, my son -

Is Your destiny so like a tender child to you -

Your calling too precious to neglect

That You give all You have for it

And take all my heart with You, too?



I am His disciple

I followed Him and drank up His words

As though they were life to me

I watched when He fed thousands with a basket full of bread.

I saw a dead girl breathe again

Battered women did not fear Him

And broken men trusted Him

I trusted Him

I trusted Him

I believed He had something better for me

Than a hundred fish in a net

Worth more than pearls or silver

But the sunlight grows dark now, and He is still up there.

How can any dream live when strangled like that?

How can any hope hold on when crushed like that?

How can love survive a death like that?

What the Cock saw on Friday night

By Hannah Skipper

He sat on the high wall that surrounded the high priest's courtyard, a stately silhouette that no one ever really noticed. If they had looked up and it wasn't the dark of night, the passersby would have seen how strikingly gorgeous he was. His plump body and regally arching neck were a rich golden brown and his keen black eyes shone like smoldering embers of coal. A bright scarlet comb crowned his stately head and his wings were streaked with emerald green. It was his tail plumage, though, that was his pride; a stunning display of feathers that boasted every color of the rainbow.

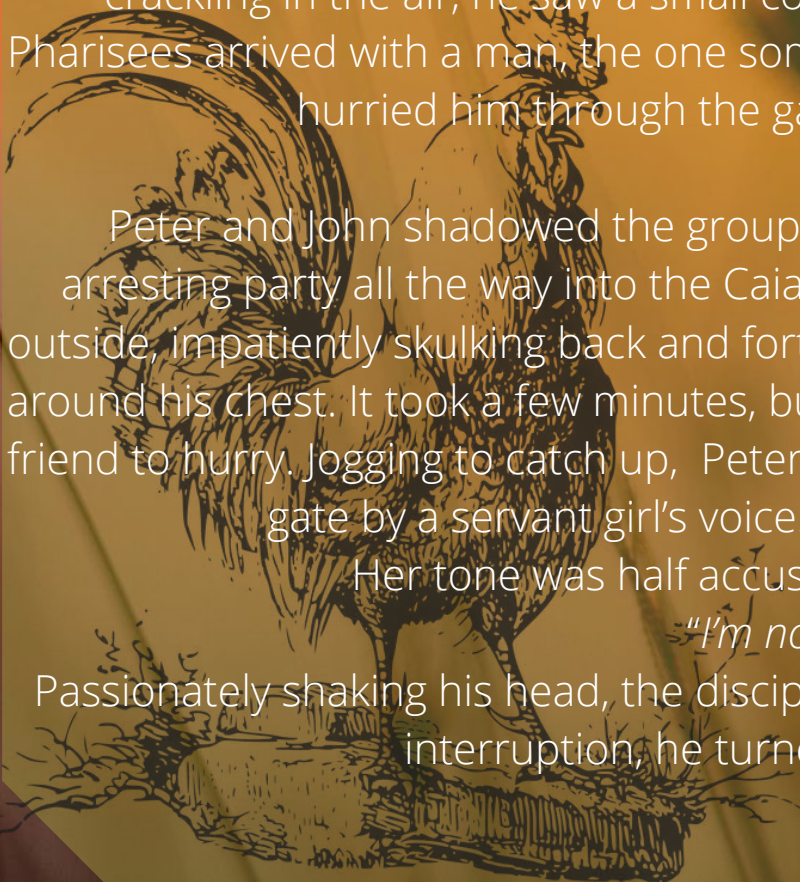
Fearlessly, he watched over the unusually large crowd milling in the street, awaiting the moment when he would announce the sun's arrival like a burglar sounding reveille. Ruffling his feathers against the chilly light breeze that swirled the rubbish on the street, he watched with disinterest as men hunched closer around the fire pits. Oblivious to the tension of restless angst and anger crackling in the air, he saw a small contingent of soldiers, officials, and Pharisees arrived with a man, the one some called Christ, under arrest. They hurried him through the gate and into the house.

Peter and John shadowed the group. John didn't hesitate to follow the arresting party all the way into the Caiaphas' house. However, Peter waited outside, impatiently skulking back and forth with his arms clenched tightly around his chest. It took a few minutes, but John returned and motioned for his friend to hurry. Jogging to catch up, Peter's progress was halted just inside the gate by a servant girl's voice. "You're one of his, aren't you?"

Her tone was half accusation, half question.

"I'm not!"

Passionately shaking his head, the disciple's denial was strident. Upset by the interruption, he turned off to the side.



Finding a place around a newly lighted fire pit, he breathed a sigh of relief. The flames blazed high and the heat was a welcome distraction for the men gathering around, particularly one with words still ringing harshly in his head. Another chilly gust brought them closer to the fire and one's eyes lingered on the newcomer. Like the servant girl, he prompted the disciple.

"You were one of the ones who was with him, weren't you?"

Peter's denial was sullen this time. He backed up a couple steps and kept his head down.

"I was not."

But the brief exchange garnered the attention of another, somewhat younger, man. He scrutinized Peter for a long minute then spoke in a rush. *"But I saw you with him! I know I did! You're a Galilean. I can tell by your accent."*

Peter's head jerked up and his face finally flamed. Swearing angrily, his denial was a harsh snap. *"Man, I was not!"*

At the same moment, cock's attention turned away from the matters of men. There was a touch of pink on the horizon and his duty summoned him. His voice rose into the morning air just as Caiaphas' door opened and Christ was led from the house. The Lord's eyes met Peter's and the Galilean crumpled.

But, in his shame, he turned too quickly, missing the look of compassion in his Lord's eyes.



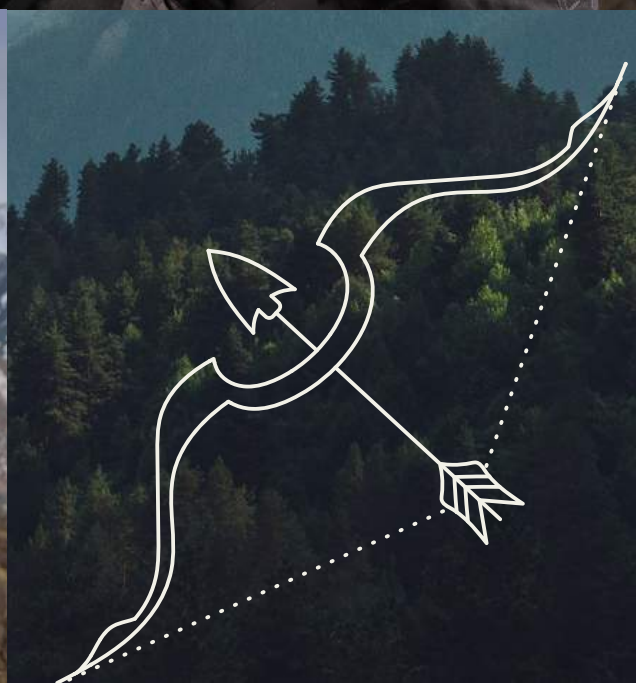


Inspired by Arwen



Model :Katie Cheshire

As spring represents renewal, we are privileged to share these lovely images from Sarah Navarre of Katie Cheshire as Arwen, who is an inspiring and empowering role model to Katie herself. She made a stunning Arwen and had overcome a lot of personal trials and this marked a triumphant milestone for her as she took her place with this beautiful Friesian stallion as a true champion.





Model: Katie Cheshire
Horse: Matisse,
Equus Noir Friesians
Photographer:
Sarah Navarre,
VanderRose Photography
www.vanderrose.com



A Death in Fantasyland

BY WARREN VALE HERMAN



My heart was racing as I made my way down the stairs. I knew I had to call the ambulance. In the muddled haze of thoughts, I made my way into the dining room. I got a piece of paper. It was crumpled around the edges. My heart rate wouldn't go down. I took out a pencil and I wrote down some things that I would miss about my life. Something had clearly gone wrong with my runaway heartbeat, and it was strange to know that today was the day I would die. I began to write. I remember the pencil marks as a weak, hollow gray, that barely marked the page. Some hopes, some regrets, somehow, I was half-blinded to the hope that maybe, the doctors could do something for me. Maybe my heart would again beat with ease. It was true. I didn't die that day. But someday, I am going to die. Someday there won't be another chance. Someday, you will die too.

It is something we all must experience, but something that is often met with a half-angry, half-dismissive "Oh, don't think about it!" as if this ultimate concern doesn't matter. And that is maybe the problem. Maybe one reason people don't like to think about death is not because it doesn't matter, but because we don't have good reasons why life matters, if, in the end, we die. But the fact remains, you and I will one day experience death. At the end of the day, maybe we are totally isolated from each other, doomed to separateness. At the end of the day, maybe we are forced to try to impose meaning on the meaningless world into which we have been tossed. When the dusk comes, we have to look back at the terrible responsibility for how we spent that time that slips through our fingers, quicker than water or sand. And then there is death. All the effort, all the close escapes. The long safety, or the long danger of daily life, and then, cornered at the end, bereft of all physical safety. The threat after all, was in our very bones. And, when night of death falls, is there dreamless sleep, or are there dreams. Nightmares? Will we ever awake? And to what kind of morning? Wishful thinking doesn't make it so.

But from what roots spring the wishes of our hearts? What do we really wish for? What do we really fear? You don't want to believe in lies. You don't want to believe in wishful thinking. No one consciously wants to be deceived, but all of us secretly just want the world to be the way we want it to be. Mostly we are all looking for comfort. That is an accusation that we can all admit to. Whether we are scrolling through our phones rather than facing a painful feeling, whether we are trying to distract ourselves in different ways from some pain we've caused, we are all running from something. We run from death, we run from guilt, we run from meaninglessness, and we try to run from isolation. But we can't get away. Now it has us, until we look away again. But if we realize that we often run away toward some mind-numbing comfort, what do we seek? When things hurt, we often seek anesthesia. We seek oblivion. Some find it in the bottle. Some find it in TV. Some in the frenzy of work. Numb. That's often what we want. A dark place. A place to hide. Crawl back into the nice warm womb. Seal us up in the stone-cold tomb. When I was a baby, I used to fall asleep after every terrifying visit to the doctor. Sleep. Block it out. Go to nothing. That was my defense. We all know that some people don't want to take responsibility for their actions. We all know people, who seem to be living lives that are

about something that we know is just a passing thing. If we're honest, we'll find a bit of that in ourselves. Maybe more than a bit. But what if that desire to go to sleep, that desire for oblivion, that desire for numbness, what if that drives people to secretly wish that death was the end? On some level, for some people, that would actually be preferable to a world of ultimate meaning and ultimate responsibility, in which death wasn't the end.

The ideas of heaven and of resurrection could fulfill our wishes, and so can the idea of not existing at all. They just do it in different ways. Heaven dulls the sting of death, and resurrection could break its dread entirely. Heaven could be a place where we are forgiven. But if death is really just nothing, like dreamless sleep, we could find a kind of comfort in that instead. That too can, in a sense, forgive. It can blot out everything. It kills the problem of meaninglessness, since even that doesn't matter. It can free us from accountability, and maybe in a seemingly more efficient way than heaven. Heaven has accountability, because heaven means hell is also possible. And we know we are guilty; we know we are responsible. We know we've done things wrong, by our own standards, let alone divine standards. We know people have been hurt by what we've done. We've even been hurt. Maybe it would be better to sleep without dreams. Maybe it would be better if death wiped it all out. Maybe that dark black ink of death will cover all the scuffs, all the scrapes, and all the filth in one creeping darkness.

This seems scientific, to think that death is the end. Science would really admit that it knows nothing about the conscious experience of death. There is a lot of research on near-death experiences, and whatever they are, they happen. However, this doesn't tell us about death, but near-death. But at least, thinking death is a nothingness takes the mystery out of it. We don't really like mystery, because that's really uncertainty. Some people like mystery novels in which we wonder who the killer is, but few people go through life, simply fascinated with what will kill them in the end. We like even less to think about what death is anyway. So, we find at least a working answer to the questions of death.

With regard to the answer to death, we fall into two camps, those who embrace the science fiction that we will cease to be, and those who embrace the fantasy that we will continue. The question is whether science fiction or fantasy corresponds to reality, not whether our accounts are well-written. There are dull and exciting works in both genres. You undoubtedly have your favorites. Whether we are writers or not, there is a limited sense in which we are the authors of our lives, and a limited sense in which we too write the backstory. Our lives happen in a context. Sometimes the context can be elegantly thought out in an epic backstory, or it can just be a set of unquestioned assumptions. But we all live by myths. Evolution and creation, progress and redemption are, in a way, all myths. A myth just means it is a life-guiding fiction. The question is which fiction is true. Some of these fictions are lies. Some fictions are real truths. Some of the things actually happened. And some of them didn't. But we spend our lives either living a lie or living a truth.

It was cold this year at Easter, the winter still holding on with a bite for a day or two. But there were also flowers. The question is whether Easter is just the passing high of the return of spring and a few candies hidden in plastic eggs. Or if there is something really pregnant in it, something that really gives life. Does the promise of a spring day, the lift of the spirit in the warm air, and at the return of light and warmth and flowers mean anything? St. Francis of Assisi is loved by almost all, religious or not and is associated with the beauty of nature. There is something about him, whether it is the romance of leaving behind worldly goods, whether it is love for the poor or needy, or whether it is a sense of praise for the gift of nature, which seems to capture the hearts of all, regardless of whether they are interested in religion or not. There is something romantic about him that is understandable. What was on his hands might not be.

For it is said that eventually, on his hands, he bore wounds. He bore wounds that matched those of one in whom he believed. He bore wounds that matched those of the Christ he served. And if his ideals are understandable to all, the miracle is less so. The great question is, what genre of story are we living in, and things like miraculous wounds make us wonder if we are hearing legends or if we have found ourselves in a fantasy. But what if we are not hearing a legend, but history. Much of what we know about history comes from a few sources. We don't

trouble ourselves much about it because little of emotional value for our daily lives rides on the list of emperors of ancient Rome, the Pharaohs of Egypt, or any number of other facts that we take entirely as truth. But the Resurrection of Jesus is something that is unbelievable because of how many everyday beliefs and behaviors it would overturn if it were true. It is ironic that even one of the premier atheist scholars still believes in the historical nature of the Resurrection, that at least there was a historical event that the early Christians saw in that way. Another great scholar notes that there are no serious academics who doubt the established historical evidence that there was some sort of Resurrection event, even if they don't necessarily buy into the idea a Resurrection is what the Church says it is. But we know the tomb was empty. We know how the Christians saw it. And we know they died, not for their beliefs, which is a common occurrence in history, but for their eyewitness testimony.

Sometimes, certain kinds of doubtful thoughts creep into my mind. When they do, they flow like the roaring of waves against great stones on the shoreline. The blast of the foaming waves. And then they recede. Because the rock stands firm in the storm. At the end of the day, the Resurrection is the best explanation for the historical fact of the empty tomb. And this is just the first link in a chain that binds me to belief. If Jesus was raised from the dead, he could send the Holy Spirit down, and if the Holy Spirit could be sent down, the Church could be inspired and guided, if the Church can be guided and the Scriptures inspired, then I can trust them, regardless of my difficulties. We could spend a long time debating each point of this, but when doubts arise, for me they come up against this structure, and the structure holds. But let us look instead of debate.

If you wonder about Resurrection, think of St. Francis, and the wounds that echoed the nails in Christ's hands and feet. And if we wonder if it is only legend, let us look at the photographs. Let us look at the hands of St. Padre Pio who bore these wounds as well in more modern times. Let us listen to the stories about him. There are many, many miraculous tales. And he was real. The church was suspicious. One high-ranking church official was not impressed, until he came to stay in the friary where St. Pio lived. After hearing the horrible noises of St. Pio wrestling with evil spirits at night, the official decided not to stay much longer. And let us also realize that until this day, the body of St. Padre Pio has not decayed. It remains today for all to see. Let us look at the incorrupt heart of St. John Vianney, who had similar battles with evil. I have seen that with my own eyes. I have also seen a real wound inflicted by demons. If this is not convincing let us point to the healings that surround Lourdes, and the incorrupt body of St. Bernadette who saw the Blessed Virgin there. Let us look at the grand miracle of Fatima, where newspaper reporters came to laugh at the simple people who thought the Virgin Mary would appear, only to be amazed and maybe even fall to their knees with thousands of others as the sun danced in the sky, and great visions appeared above them. There are photos of this day. One who knew the countryside commented on one picture. The sun, they said, is never naturally in that part of the sky. Don't ask me whether the sun really danced. We are talking about a miracle. This is something out of the ordinary. But we are talking about something seen by people who were hostile to the Church, which they had to acknowledge. Last, let us look at the shroud of Turin, which I've heard cannot even be made today through modern technology, which bears the image of a man wracked with pain. It is said that the image was burnt into the cloth by some wild blast of light, some big bang of radiation. Let us see the evidence of a world renewed. Let us see the evidence of resurrection. Let us forget the science fiction, and face the fact of fantasy. For it is true.

And let us realize that the truth opens us up to hope and not to despair. The world of science fiction is the world in which our only hope is death, but the world of fantasy gives us the hope of eternal life. In Michigan was another who wore the habit of St. Francis, Father Solanus Casey. He counseled people of all walks of life, and miraculous cures followed his prayers. But what has impacted my life the most is his teaching of thanking God ahead of time. We can explain this in this way. Our deepest cry is always to our mothers, and in our cry is the trust that our mother will answer. This trust in a parent is the same kind of trust we are to have in our Father in heaven. Fr. Solanus, who has eventually become Blessed Solanus Casey, as he is on the path to sainthood, had a special way of practicing this kind of trust. He would thank God ahead of time. He would joke that this was a way of almost twisting God's arm, but in the end, it is something that God deserves. He is trustworthy, so he deserves our gratitude for what we hope

he will do for us. In the face of failings and despair, this teaching has let me rise again and again with strength of heart. So, thank God ahead of time for all the blessings, graces, mercy, and pardon that we hope he will give. Let us also thank him for whatever he sends. Let it move you to love for him and to repentance. Let it help make you live the real life of Fantasyland.

But if there is the outer resurrection, there is also the inner resurrection. One is rooted in the other. A good eternal life hinges on whether we now enter into the dance of love through prayer and sacrament. When we sin, our souls sustain wounds, some small, and some mortal. In the face of this deadly combat, we need the wisdom of Sr. Consolata Betrone, who was also in the Franciscan family, among the Poor Clare nuns. Jesus taught Sr. Consolata that she should repeat the words “Jesus, Mary, I love You. Save Souls,” as much as possible so that her life became a ceaseless act of love. This is not magic, but a miracle. If we commit a perfect act of love, we rise back to life in God.

Although fantasy, with all its dragons, its giants, its damsels in distress, is a much more dangerous world than we think, love holds it together. And belief in Heaven and Hell, belief in the Resurrection, is, in the final analysis, a facing of a more awe-inspiring reality than believing that death is the end. Faith is innocent of the charge that it is merely a defense mechanism based in wishful thinking. It is the science-fiction view that death is the end which is the lulling opiate of many today, the antidote to accountability. And the science can support the dark magic of the demons, as we look to their effects in exorcisms, and the science can support the light of the miracles in the bodies of saints that do not decay, in Eucharistic hosts that bleed or turn to the tender muscle of the heart. And science can lead us away from science fiction to the truth that not only is the Resurrection is history, but it is a future for us all.

You and I will never be really dead. We will never again cease to exist. You and I are both mortals in that death will need to be faced, but immortals, in that we rise again. We will get our bodies back. Whether that will be good or ill, a final glory or a final shame, the fullness of salvation or damnation, will be determined by whether or not we live with faith, hope and love in the one who died and rose for us. Death is no silent sci-fi nothingness. Your death will be a death in fantasyland, and you will rise again.

Happy Easter. Welcome to Fantasyland.



Change and Rest

A REFLECTION ON THE WORK OF EDMUND SPENSER

BY HARRY MOYSE

In 2019 and 2020 I had the privilege of having a teaching position at the University of Warwick, where despite my academic work being in Maths, I was able to work with people from many departments and institutes on topics outside of subject boundaries and delve into those interesting ideas like the logic of poetry that Academics so seldom get to work on. The following began as a response to a student's reflection on Heraclitus, and became the address I gave at the close of my fellowship at the start of Lent when the term was cut short and the staff and the students were sent home.

As Lent comes to an end a year later, and the world continues to be in upheaval I feel it is relevant again.

In the late 16th century, perhaps the greatest poet of the English language, Edmund Spenser was driven from his home in Ireland. It was burned by the rebels and he lost a child in the fire. As Ireland's nine-year war raged and he went from the upper echelons of Irish government to poverty, privation and finally death on the streets of London and the great poem he was writing was caught short.

Ten years earlier, this fate would have been inconceivable. Because of this great poem, the renowned Sir Walter Raleigh had sponsored his coming to the court of Queen Elizabeth. He was then sponsored by the crown to write his poetry and almost was given a seat at that court.

What was the poem that had brought him so high?

The Faerie Queene an epic twelve volume work, that would bring together the pantheon of British legendary Heroes – from St George to King Arthur, and interweave them with fairy tales, Greek and Roman myth, scenes from biblical prophecy and reflections of the ascendancy and achievements of women and women rulers.

Ten years later, as his home burns and the lives of the poet and his family descend into chaos, this great work is cut short at the start of its seventh volume.

It is now impossible for Spenser to tell the story of how Arthur, Una, the Knight of the Redcross and all of the other characters will ever reach the Court of the Fairie Queene. Motivated by this tragedy, his attention shifts to a new character, Mutability, a titaness conquering all creation.

This makes sense. Tragedies have a way of making us conscious of mutability – the fact that our lives will end, the fact that the things we create will have an end, the terrible boundlessness of our existence. But Edmund's genius wasn't just in observing the world, but constructing narratives that reflect and go beyond it.

Mutability in turn, meets her father time, and like the poet, and all of his other characters she finds her end and limitation. This story reaches its climax in the last Canto - in contrast to all the others with their thousands of lines, it only has eighteen. In these last few lines his focus shifts from the upturning of everything towards rest and the immutable, and the great work ends abruptly.

When I bethink me on that speech whyleare,
Of Mutability, and well it weigh:
Me seems, that though she all unworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule ; yet very sooth to say,
In all things else she bears the greatest sway.
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vain to cast away;
Whose flowering pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.
Then gin I think on that which Nature said,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But steadfast rest of all things firmly stayed
Upon the pillars of Eternity,
That is contrare to Mutabilitie:
For, all that moveth, doth in Change delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
O thou great Sabbaoth God, grant me that Sabbaoth sight.

But buried in those beautiful words there is a strange thread of logic that defies tragedy. Heraclitus famously said “the only constant is change”, Spenser illustrated this with Mutability conquering all, but he also challenges it. If, as Heraclitus said, the only constant is change, will that itself ever change?

In that final stanza, as tragedy comes down on him and his life is swept away Spenser argues yes. He seems to make the case that for logic to be satisfied, change can't be constant an eternal. In the same way that the phrase “all generalizations are false” defeats itself, or the phrase “all truths are relative” disproves itself he realizes that the claim that change rules all is itself an oxymoron- something that cannot possibly be true.

Grabbing hold of this logic his reflection on tragedy becomes unlike those in any other work I am familiar with. Instead of doing what others do, swearing revenge, embracing despair or even looking past the agony that change has brought to him, his poetry holds up mutability itself and says confidently – the existence and totality of change is proof of the existence of something beyond it.

In the final line his logic is interrupted by a prayer which seems to burst from his heart onto the page: O thou great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight. Edmund prays, not for an end to change, or even for his life to change back, but to see that which is at peace and at rest in the midst of change.

As the university is a secular place I didn't close with a prayer. As a result whilst the above felt finished, it didn't feel resolved. It felt like a song that ended on a 7th chord. However, I feel Fellowship and Fairydust is a different kind of place, a place where we celebrate the beauty at the margins of the world. The magic of Gandalf, the winged creatures that dance off of Macdonalds pages and more than all those, the numinous realities from which the world and all the beauty in its margins, songs and stories descends.

Taking the conceptual lens of Spenser and applying it to Easter, we see that the cross and the empty tomb is the ultimate example of the above – the moment where mutability itself is revealed as mutable and humbled at the feet of a God who is eternal. For us, this is the fountainhead through which every other miracle flows, and our source of calm in every storm. Whoever you are, and whatever faith or brand of unbelief you accept I pray that in this time of upheaval you would be able to take hold of a small piece of this miracle and experience the magical peace of Easter.



The Observant One

BY HARRIET SAMS

Why oh why
Mummy, oh wise one,
please tell me this:
the animals I see
all around us are having babies
in the bright abundance of Spring
and we humans can have them
any day we want.
why, oh wise one?
Because, oh observant one,
there is food for mother
and baby in Spring so that
the gods of the future are satisfied,
the worm is sacrificed for the blackbird
See! His beak is full
lamb and bird,
badger and hedgehog
No, it's ok to be sad to see
how the worm wriggles and strains
in the grasp of impending death terror
but it is all preordained;
that is what Spring is all about
some die so others live
But humans-
to answer your question,
we learned long ago to harness
more than Spring's bounty
and so we could take food
and preserve it
like mummies and bog bodies
for us to satiate our earthly needs,



now we grow or fly
what we want from
where we want
any day of the week
Our fecundity knows no
human limitation but our
cycles of moon days and
this power has terrified us
generation by generation
so we make it Spring whenever our offspring births
for terror of starvation
So mummy, oh wise one,
when we cannot fly raspberries from chile
nor potatoes from Russia
will then all babies be born in April,
like the lambs and the chicks?
And all our dead still die in the Spring?
She sees some depths in this time of story and meaning,
This observant one.

SUNDAY MORNING

AN EASTER STORY

by Emily Kopf

She didn't understand.

He was their Messiah, their Christ — it didn't matter what language the word was in, He was the One chosen by the great God Himself to bring everlasting peace and righteousness to her people.

How could He be dead?

He had such power — to heal the sick and raise the dead with only a word from His mouth. He had escaped death so many times simply by walking away in the midst of a murderous crowd.

Why didn't He protect Himself?

She had suspected that He was somehow God Himself in a human body. Who else could perform so many miracles, even raising the dead?

But no — not now, that couldn't be. He was dead. God couldn't die. That would be impossible.

She had seen it. She had watched them kill Him. Tears trickled down her eyes anew at the thought, and she struggled to push the memories away. Memories of such horror, of seeing the One she loved so beaten and bloody she couldn't recognize Him as human. She couldn't even close her eyes to escape the gory memories flashing in her mind's eye. She shuddered.

How could they have done that to Him? He was so gentle, so kind.

Sometimes she wished He would have been a little less gentle and kind and had beaten back those insufferable Roman heathens like the prophecies foretold.

But it didn't matter now. He was dead. Her Jesus was dead.

She felt a touch on her shoulder, bringing her back to the present where she huddled in the dark. It was one of the other women who had followed Jesus like she had.

"It's almost dawn."

Dawn of the third day since He died. Had it only been that long?

"Some of the other ladies and I are going to anoint His body. He deserves a proper burial. Would you like to join us?"

She might as well go — it wasn't as if she could sleep. She crawled to her feet and silently followed the other women. The somber procession trekked through

Jerusalem and toward the tomb in the garden.

“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” one of the women asked. The women started offering ideas, but none seemed sufficient.

At last, she could see the tomb. And as the sun began to peek above the horizon, they felt the tremors of an earthquake and stumbled to the ground. The tremors brought back memories of that dark day. The earth had shaken then, too, like a punishment from God for killing His Chosen One. She held back another sob.

But as her eyes fastened back on the tomb, a man shining like the sun descended from the sky, rolled the stone away from the tomb, and sat upon it.

The woman cowered in fear, and the Roman guards, who were always so intimidating and dedicated, collapsed to the ground in a dead faint!

She couldn't think. What now? Was God's judgment coming on them for what they had done?

But the angel said, “Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as He said would happen.

Come, see where His body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and He is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there. Remember what I have told you.”

But — what was this? The angel said Jesus was alive? How could that be? Oh, how she hoped that was true!

Through the blur of her tears and racing thoughts, she found herself running back into the city with the other women. Breathless, they stammered the story to the men who had followed Jesus. The men scoffed, though two of them raced to see if it was true.

The hours of joy, fear, hope, doubt, speculation, and excitement passed. As evening came, she found herself sitting with the others in a room.

Then He was there. The doors were locked, but He was there as if He had always been. Jesus was alive!

He looked a little different — healthier, more alive, more beautiful — but it was definitely Him. More tears came to her, but this time of joy.

He wasn't a ghost, He was real. She knew it because she could touch Him and see that He ate and drank.

The scars from His death were there too. No, she hadn't imagined that. She could still see the images in her mind if she closed her eyes.

But He was alive.

As He spoke and explained, it all made sense to her. She and all of humankind had disobeyed their God and Creator. They deserved death and separation from God. But He, in His mercy, had shown them how to make animal sacrifices to cover their sin with the death of an innocent creature: one innocent life in exchange for one sinful life. But the animals weren't enough. A mere animal could never take the whole punishment of a human's sin. So God Himself had become the man Jesus and lived a perfect life, innocent of any sin. And though He had the power to stop it, He died as a sacrifice to permanently get rid of the sin of anyone who chooses to believe in Him. And to prove that He was God and that His sacrifice worked, Jesus came back to life, impossibly, after three days. She cried with joy to see it. How much He must love her to die for Her, evil sinner that she was. How sweet it was to see Him alive again and to know from the evidence before her eyes that she was believing the truth. Jesus, the true God, Savior, and Lord.

...

Verse quotes from NLT. Mark 16:3 and Matthew 28:5-





Celebrating Easter in a Pandemic

By Ben Fearn

The last year has been incredibly difficult for everyone. Whether it's through bereavement, financial hardship, job losses or simply missing human interaction we've all felt a sense of collective grief because of Covid-19.

As human beings, whether Christian or not, we find solace in the so-called little things: a handshake, a hug, a catchup over a coffee with a friend or a pint in the pub. It's the little things that can make a world of difference, yet throughout much of the last year even the little things have been hard (or legally impossible) to do.

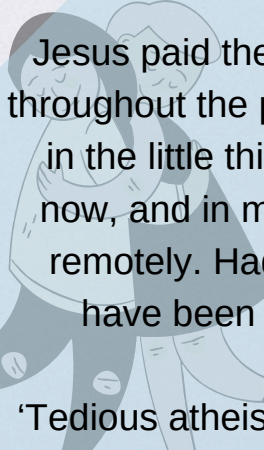
Easter is the most important time of year in the Christian calendar, but in 2020 my worship was restricted to a 40-minute Zoom service with my church in Darley Dale. As lovely as it was to collectively join in praise in some form, it still felt like a sucker punch to not be able to greet people in person.

I was fortunate enough this year to be able to go to church in person, thanks to the next step of the UK's gradual easing of lockdown. Even this was restrained, as congregation numbers were limited by social distancing, mask wearing and safety guidelines. There were no joyous hugs, as much as people wanted them! Yet being physically inside a church for the first time in months felt immensely comforting.

We're never meant to have it easy as Christians!

It's hard not to look back to some sort of 'golden age' of church fellowship whenever we struggle on through the pandemic. It's comforting to think back to a time when hugs were flowing and hymns were sung at full volume. But we must still count our blessings. Persecution is still rife across the globe against believers of all faiths and sceptics alike. Freedom of worship is a basic right which nevertheless isn't shared by all. The early church often went into hiding, yet were told by Jesus "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). It's immensely difficult not to be able to see our friends and family in the ways that we used to, and we shouldn't downplay that fact. It's hard not to think of the line from John 15:13 – "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends".





Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice, and we can remember that in any which way we can throughout the pandemic and beyond. Times are often hard, but we can still take comfort in the little things, even if they've changed slightly. The world is more interconnected now, and in most cases we've been able to see each other's faces and keep in touch remotely. Had the pandemic happened even 20 years ago large communities would have been even more isolated. Church Zoom services have given us a sense of fellowship, however different it is to what we're used to.

'Tedious atheism' There's no other way to describe it. The likes of Richard Dawkins and Professor Alice Roberts often seem to trigger themselves around these special Christian holidays, with the latter rather lazily Tweeting on Good Friday that "Just a little reminder today. Dead people – don't come back to life". And I thought the concept of certainty was a religious thing! It's often the case that some of the most intelligent atheists make the biggest strawman arguments; Professor Roberts didn't even get the day right. It's not much to ask that people of all faiths get to enjoy religious festivals peacefully? Thank goodness for the sassy reply of Fergus Butler-Gallie on Twitter to Professor Roberts, who said "ur gonna [expletive deleted] the bed Sunday morning hon x" Perhaps the answer to 'tedious atheism' is 'sassy Christianity'?

'Easter songs'?

This is a minor point from me, but I noticed a good point on Twitter the other day that we don't really have 'Easter songs'. There are Easter hymns of course, just like there are Christmas carols – but we have plenty of secular songs to mark Christmas and the Winter season as well.

Perhaps someone is missing a trick? I guess the previously much heralded 'Christmas Number 1' in the singles charts is hard to replicate into the 'Easter Number 1'. I'll no doubt be corrected on these points, but I'm hard pressed to think of secular Easter songs off the top of my head. It's these seasonal gaps that make hearing time-appropriated hymns all the more special due to their rarity for the rest of the year: think 'Thine Be The Glory' and 'Christ The Lord Is Risen Today'.

'The way forward'

We will be able to worship in the ways that we used to soon. Things will get better. For now we must focus on the global community where we can: to victims of war, poverty, racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny, violence and terror. These evils haven't gone away just because there's been a pandemic; we must always strive to do more to prevent them. Let the legacy of the pandemic be for the Church to emerge from it emboldened to do good.

I'll finish by wishing you all a very happy Easter and a spiritually enriching 2021.

Peace be with you.

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The Great Miracle

by Nathan Stone

To too many people, Easter means bunnies, baby chicks in yellow down and candy; ham too, for those who are more “traditionally” minded. Christians, naturally, profess that Easter is more than this, just as Christmas is more than presents under a tree delivered the night before by a fat, jolly old elf. But even in Christian circles, what Easter actually is, is getting lost in the shuffle. Not so much the shuffle of commercialism which has already gotten its grubby hands on Christmas and Halloween but the shuffle of familiarity.

Every Christian confesses that Easter is the Great Feast because Christ rose from the dead, thereby defeating death and winning for us our salvation, which is no more than the truth. But the familiarity of the story has robbed us of the real power of the Easter season. It is very tempting today to see Easter as part of a simple chain of cause and effect: The Last Supper of Holy Thursday leading inevitably to the Passion on Good Friday which leads to the final bout of waiting on Holy Saturday which finally ends with Christ coming out of the tomb on Easter. What this sterile chain has hidden is the fact that Easter itself is a miracle.

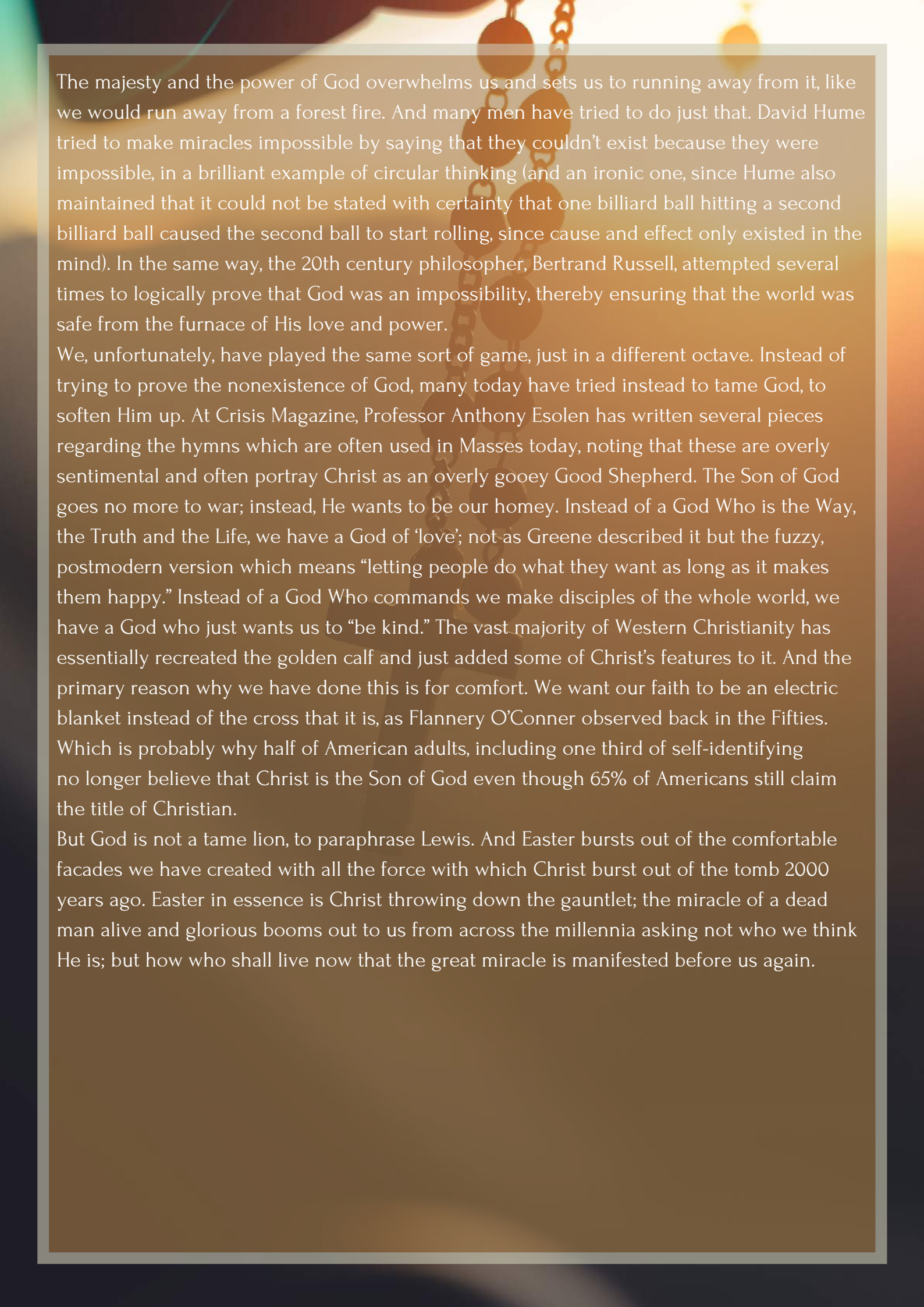
When we think of miracles we will, no doubt, think—again—of the familiar ones with which we have grown up. The Bible will give us the examples of the burning bush, Gideon’s tests to God, the bronze serpent, the multiplication of the loaves and fish and the raising from the dead of Lazarus. Christians of other denominations, like Catholics, will include the Dance of the Sun in Fatima, St. Juan Diego’s tunic, and the many examples of Eucharistic miracles and incorruptible saints. But, again, the presence of so many different examples steals from us the real nature of what a miracle is, namely: Something which not only should not happen but cannot happen in the real world. Set a bush on fire and it will inevitably burn due to the nature of wood and fire; it’s cause and effect. Likewise, if the sun did decide on its own volition to race erratically in its orbit before deciding to fly down upon us, not only would the Earth be turned back into its primordial lava but the entire solar system would be destroyed now that its anchorage point had decided to leave its place. These things can only happen when they do because God wills them to happen; He wills the impossible to leave the realm of the impossible and to burst upon the realm of the world. He wills to make the impossible real impossibilities in that they really exist.

It should be noted that this does not mean that God only causes miracles when they occur and the rest of the whole cloth of natural phenomena rolls along mechanically. God, as Pure Actuality, is the ultimate cause of everything that occurs, to pull Aquinas' cosmological argument into the fray. Miracles though are when God steps outside of the rules and systems He established and manifests Himself directly in the world again, as He did in the Old Testament and in the three years of Christ's public ministry. And that is the reason why miracles are so terrifying.

If we were face to face with any supposed denizen of the supernatural, whether it was a vampire, a ghost, an elf, fairie, leprechaun, selkie, pooka, goblin, ogre, werewolf or witch, we would be natural and justifiably terrified. The great ability of supposed supernatural things to terrify us comes from the fact that we know that these things do not belong in the world. The dead are supposed to stay dead; they are not supposed to rise from the grave, either in spirit form as a ghost; in physical form only, as a zombie; or as a hybrid of the two as a vampire. And the same is true for the rest. Therefore, when we see them, either in the theater of the imagination, on the screen, or in person, our minds are caught between what our senses are telling us and what our brains continue to shriek at us is an impossibility, giving rise to the terror, or, at the very least, the creepiness that we feel.

Miracles are the same. Confronted with something that we know cannot exist in the real world, we would freeze in terror. Forget the familiarity of the stories and actually put yourself in Moses' place when he saw the burning bush. Or among the crowd when Lazarus came stumbling out from his tomb after being dead for four days because a rabbi had commanded a dead man to come out. I am fairly certain that we would not take either calmly. And it is important to remember that the people who experienced these miracles first hand were terrified. When the disciples saw Christ calm the sea or be transfigured, their initial reaction was to fall on their faces in fear. It was the same for Tobit and Tobias when Raphael revealed himself as a seraphim; father and son collapsed before his feet and Raphael had to assure them that they would not die, even though he had revealed his real nature to them and, ostensibly, allowed them to see a glimmer of his glory. Today it seems almost blasphemous to say that the God Who is Love could be a source of terror but it is precisely because God is Love that He causes the greatest type of terror within us. In his novel, *The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene had his protagonist priest observe:

God is love. I don't say the heart doesn't feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditch-water. We wouldn't recognize that love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us - God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.



The majesty and the power of God overwhelms us and sets us to running away from it, like we would run away from a forest fire. And many men have tried to do just that. David Hume tried to make miracles impossible by saying that they couldn't exist because they were impossible, in a brilliant example of circular thinking (and an ironic one, since Hume also maintained that it could not be stated with certainty that one billiard ball hitting a second billiard ball caused the second ball to start rolling, since cause and effect only existed in the mind). In the same way, the 20th century philosopher, Bertrand Russell, attempted several times to logically prove that God was an impossibility, thereby ensuring that the world was safe from the furnace of His love and power.

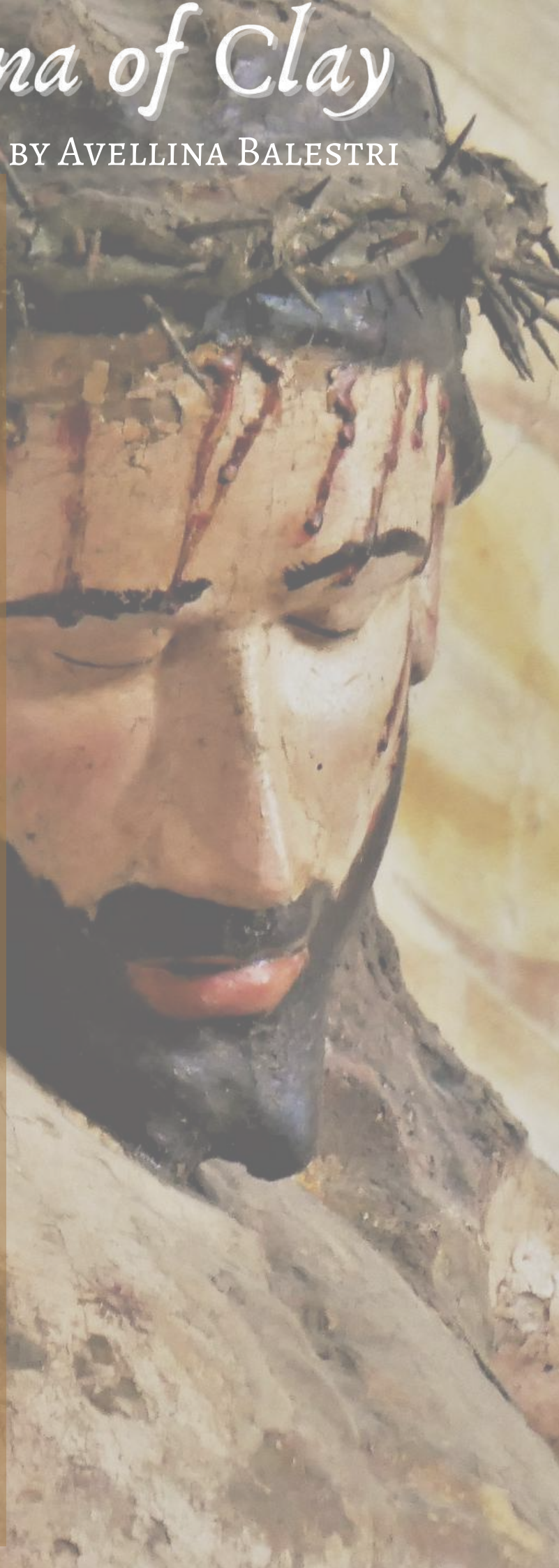
We, unfortunately, have played the same sort of game, just in a different octave. Instead of trying to prove the nonexistence of God, many today have tried instead to tame God, to soften Him up. At Crisis Magazine, Professor Anthony Esolen has written several pieces regarding the hymns which are often used in Masses today, noting that these are overly sentimental and often portray Christ as an overly gooey Good Shepherd. The Son of God goes no more to war; instead, He wants to be our homey. Instead of a God Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, we have a God of 'love'; not as Greene described it but the fuzzy, postmodern version which means "letting people do what they want as long as it makes them happy." Instead of a God Who commands we make disciples of the whole world, we have a God who just wants us to "be kind." The vast majority of Western Christianity has essentially recreated the golden calf and just added some of Christ's features to it. And the primary reason why we have done this is for comfort. We want our faith to be an electric blanket instead of the cross that it is, as Flannery O'Connor observed back in the Fifties. Which is probably why half of American adults, including one third of self-identifying no longer believe that Christ is the Son of God even though 65% of Americans still claim the title of Christian.

But God is not a tame lion, to paraphrase Lewis. And Easter bursts out of the comfortable facades we have created with all the force with which Christ burst out of the tomb 2000 years ago. Easter in essence is Christ throwing down the gauntlet; the miracle of a dead man alive and glorious booms out to us from across the millennia asking not who we think He is; but how who shall live now that the great miracle is manifested before us again.

The Drama of Clay

BY AVELLINA BALESTRI

This is the drama of clay
And the passion of the flood
Bread cast over the waters
Breathed upon and broken
Like God upon the ground
Ugly as sin and sorrowing,
Pure and pouring out
The pelican offers blood
The bridegroom brings the wine
Lo, the seams are bursting
And the chicks take their nourishment!
This is the way of weeping,
Our Via Dolorosa
This is the song of mourning
The rustle of the altar's drape
And the fonts drained dry
Wait for the rending
In this strange silence
For words can hold no sway
When God forsakes God.
This is something old
That has never happened before.
This is something new
From before the first jeweled dawn.
That God is sent to Hell
And sets His fire there.
Rise up, rise up, and melt the stone!
Make the rocks cry out:
Hail, our King, come forth for slaughter!
Hail, our Victor, stretched o'er the gap!
Feel the earthquake
In its groaning glory.
Our happy fault is bleeding
Cut to the apple core
Pierced like a lamb's heart
And His brow is crowned
With the wounds that heal.



Faith, Fast, Feast and Festival

How Christians Commemorated the Death and Resurrection
of Christ In Late Medieval England

BY T.J. GUILLE

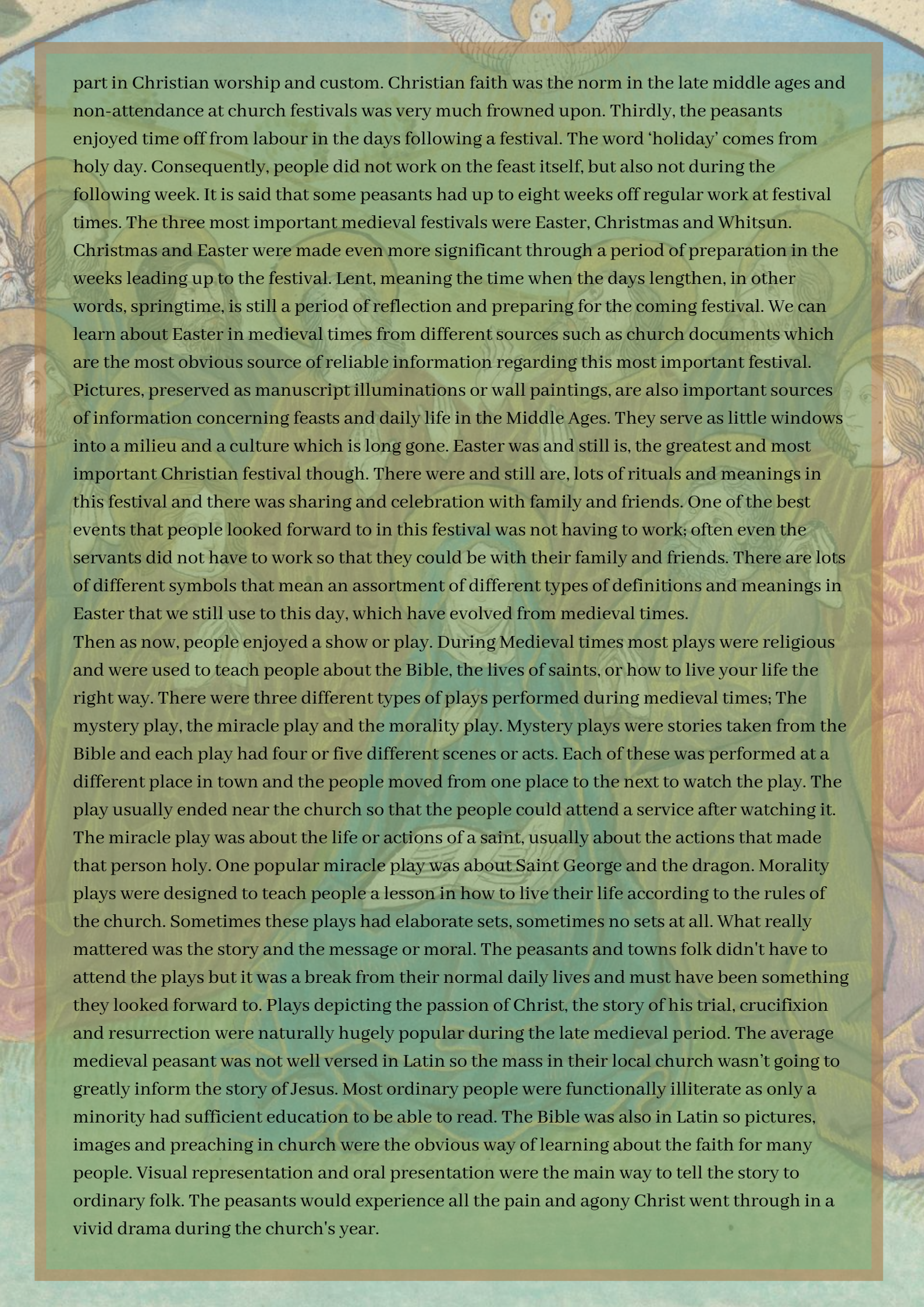
This article aims to explain the importance of Easter to medieval Christians and points out some of the ways that they learned about their faith and celebrated the death and resurrection of their saviour.

“The death of the Lord our God should not be a cause of shame for us; rather, it should be our greatest hope, our greatest glory. In taking upon himself the death that he found in us, he has most faithfully promised to give us life in him, such as we cannot have of ourselves.”¹

St Augustine of Hippo

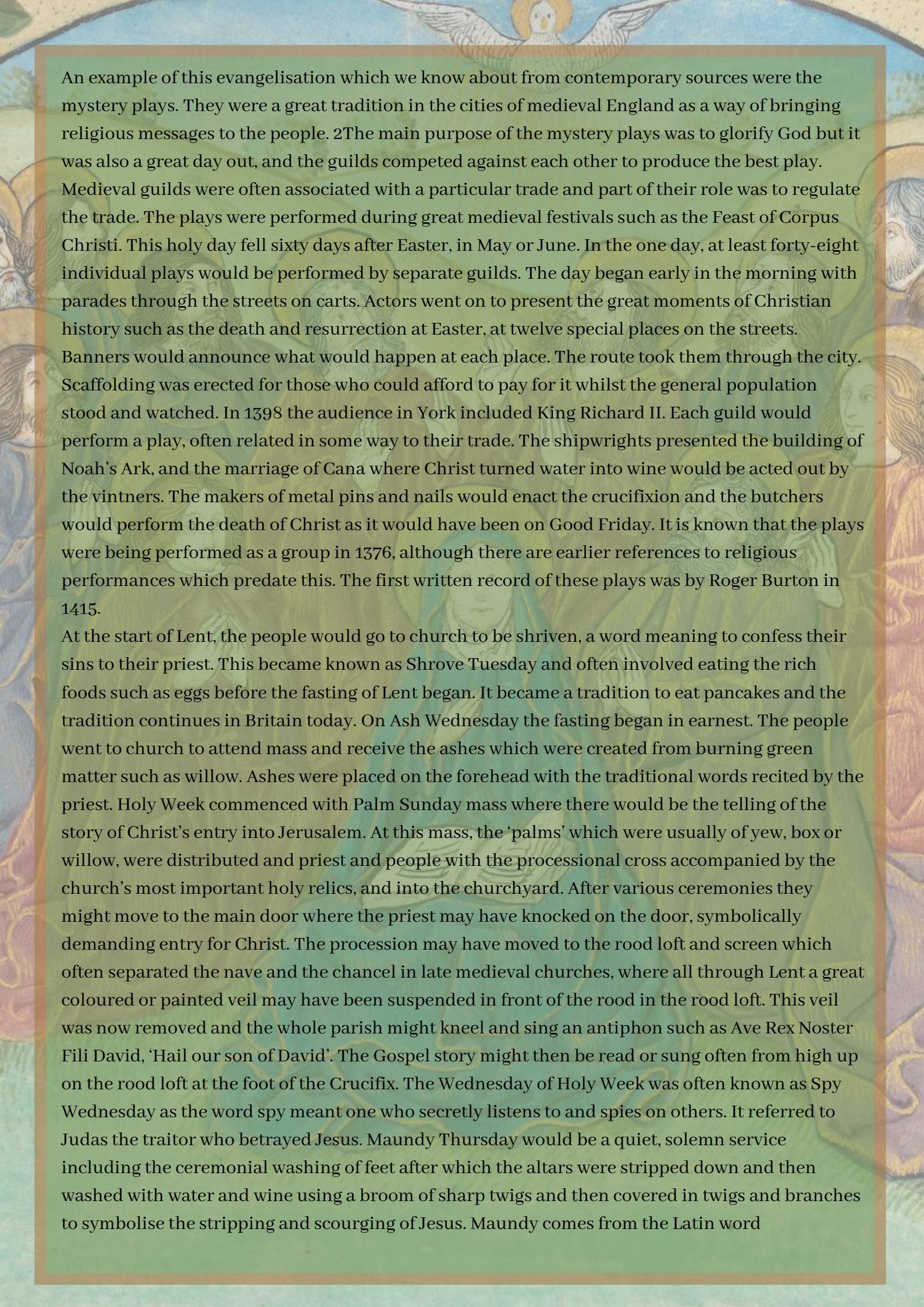
A question which puzzles some people today is how a largely illiterate population in medieval England learned about the central tenet of their faith, namely, the death and resurrection of their Lord and saviour. How was the Easter story communicated and celebrated when most people could barely read or write? The answer to that is briefly through preaching, storytelling, visual imagery and through plays and dramas. The ordinary Catholic would experience the story through attending church services and partaking in the fasts and festivals which punctuated the year. Easter was of course, central to the Christian year. Many towns and villages had their preaching crosses where friars or other preachers could address the townspeople and tell them about the story of their faith. As almost all were of the same faith, it was a shared experience for most of the people.

Any culture has its feasts and festivals, and medieval England was no exception. Modern English society though, has lost much of the sense of the meaning of feasts and festivals which, in the past, were of central importance. In modern, secular Britain, religious festivals have mostly lost their exceptional, unique, the non-repeatable character with perhaps, arguably, the exception of Christmas. Thus, Christian festivals today have tended to become little more than hollowed out mentions on a calendar except for a Christian minority. In the late middle ages the harder and more monotonous daily lives were, the more these church holy days and feasts would be an occasion to escape the daily life for at least some hours. Feasts made daily life more tolerable or let peasants forget their daily struggles for a while. Feasts would have been celebrated for very different occasions: on the celebration day of a local or church-wide saint, for a wedding or a funeral or other special occasion. Nevertheless, a feast did not only serve as an escape from the everyday, it also marked a holy time of prayer and reflection. What the faithful medieval Catholic did as well as believed, marked these times out as special. Purchasing new clothes, preparing special meals and welcoming people into your home mattered to them just as it does today. For medieval people, religious festivals had great significance. Firstly, the secular year was designed around the religious calendar of the Catholic church. Secondly, almost everyone took



part in Christian worship and custom. Christian faith was the norm in the late middle ages and non-attendance at church festivals was very much frowned upon. Thirdly, the peasants enjoyed time off from labour in the days following a festival. The word 'holiday' comes from holy day. Consequently, people did not work on the feast itself, but also not during the following week. It is said that some peasants had up to eight weeks off regular work at festival times. The three most important medieval festivals were Easter, Christmas and Whitsun. Christmas and Easter were made even more significant through a period of preparation in the weeks leading up to the festival. Lent, meaning the time when the days lengthen, in other words, springtime, is still a period of reflection and preparing for the coming festival. We can learn about Easter in medieval times from different sources such as church documents which are the most obvious source of reliable information regarding this most important festival. Pictures, preserved as manuscript illuminations or wall paintings, are also important sources of information concerning feasts and daily life in the Middle Ages. They serve as little windows into a milieu and a culture which is long gone. Easter was and still is, the greatest and most important Christian festival though. There were and still are, lots of rituals and meanings in this festival and there was sharing and celebration with family and friends. One of the best events that people looked forward to in this festival was not having to work; often even the servants did not have to work so that they could be with their family and friends. There are lots of different symbols that mean an assortment of different types of definitions and meanings in Easter that we still use to this day, which have evolved from medieval times.

Then as now, people enjoyed a show or play. During Medieval times most plays were religious and were used to teach people about the Bible, the lives of saints, or how to live your life the right way. There were three different types of plays performed during medieval times; The mystery play, the miracle play and the morality play. Mystery plays were stories taken from the Bible and each play had four or five different scenes or acts. Each of these was performed at a different place in town and the people moved from one place to the next to watch the play. The play usually ended near the church so that the people could attend a service after watching it. The miracle play was about the life or actions of a saint, usually about the actions that made that person holy. One popular miracle play was about Saint George and the dragon. Morality plays were designed to teach people a lesson in how to live their life according to the rules of the church. Sometimes these plays had elaborate sets, sometimes no sets at all. What really mattered was the story and the message or moral. The peasants and towns folk didn't have to attend the plays but it was a break from their normal daily lives and must have been something they looked forward to. Plays depicting the passion of Christ, the story of his trial, crucifixion and resurrection were naturally hugely popular during the late medieval period. The average medieval peasant was not well versed in Latin so the mass in their local church wasn't going to greatly inform the story of Jesus. Most ordinary people were functionally illiterate as only a minority had sufficient education to be able to read. The Bible was also in Latin so pictures, images and preaching in church were the obvious way of learning about the faith for many people. Visual representation and oral presentation were the main way to tell the story to ordinary folk. The peasants would experience all the pain and agony Christ went through in a vivid drama during the church's year.



An example of this evangelisation which we know about from contemporary sources were the mystery plays. They were a great tradition in the cities of medieval England as a way of bringing religious messages to the people. The main purpose of the mystery plays was to glorify God but it was also a great day out, and the guilds competed against each other to produce the best play. Medieval guilds were often associated with a particular trade and part of their role was to regulate the trade. The plays were performed during great medieval festivals such as the Feast of Corpus Christi. This holy day fell sixty days after Easter, in May or June. In the one day, at least forty-eight individual plays would be performed by separate guilds. The day began early in the morning with parades through the streets on carts. Actors went on to present the great moments of Christian history such as the death and resurrection at Easter, at twelve special places on the streets. Banners would announce what would happen at each place. The route took them through the city. Scaffolding was erected for those who could afford to pay for it whilst the general population stood and watched. In 1398 the audience in York included King Richard II. Each guild would perform a play, often related in some way to their trade. The shipwrights presented the building of Noah's Ark, and the marriage of Cana where Christ turned water into wine would be acted out by the vintners. The makers of metal pins and nails would enact the crucifixion and the butchers would perform the death of Christ as it would have been on Good Friday. It is known that the plays were being performed as a group in 1376, although there are earlier references to religious performances which predate this. The first written record of these plays was by Roger Burton in 1415.

At the start of Lent, the people would go to church to be shriven, a word meaning to confess their sins to their priest. This became known as Shrove Tuesday and often involved eating the rich foods such as eggs before the fasting of Lent began. It became a tradition to eat pancakes and the tradition continues in Britain today. On Ash Wednesday the fasting began in earnest. The people went to church to attend mass and receive the ashes which were created from burning green matter such as willow. Ashes were placed on the forehead with the traditional words recited by the priest. Holy Week commenced with Palm Sunday mass where there would be the telling of the story of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. At this mass, the 'palms' which were usually of yew, box or willow, were distributed and priest and people with the processional cross accompanied by the church's most important holy relics, and into the churchyard. After various ceremonies they might move to the main door where the priest may have knocked on the door, symbolically demanding entry for Christ. The procession may have moved to the rood loft and screen which often separated the nave and the chancel in late medieval churches, where all through Lent a great coloured or painted veil may have been suspended in front of the rood in the rood loft. This veil was now removed and the whole parish might kneel and sing an antiphon such as Ave Rex Noster Fili David, 'Hail our son of David'. The Gospel story might then be read or sung often from high up on the rood loft at the foot of the Crucifix. The Wednesday of Holy Week was often known as Spy Wednesday as the word spy meant one who secretly listens to and spies on others. It referred to Judas the traitor who betrayed Jesus. Maundy Thursday would be a quiet, solemn service including the ceremonial washing of feet after which the altars were stripped down and then washed with water and wine using a broom of sharp twigs and then covered in twigs and branches to symbolise the stripping and scourging of Jesus. Maundy comes from the Latin word

for command and refers to Jesus' command to 'Love one another as I have loved you.'³

Good Friday was a day of mourning and fasting, and generally speaking a day when nobody would use iron tools or nails if they could help it in honour of the death of their saviour. There was no mass on Good Friday but a service called *Tenebrae*, meaning darkness, was held in the afternoon about the time it was believed that Jesus died. The congregation would observe the veiled cross and after it had been unveiled, 'creep to the cross' on hands and knees with bare feet to venerate it by kissing the feet of the dead saviour. The Passion story would be read from the Gospel of John, and the service was held almost completely in darkness, with one candle holder, gradually put out to show that darkness was falling on the world. Eventually, only the centremost candle or 'hearse' remained lit, representing the light of Christ. As the congregation knelt on the stone floor in the flickering shadows of the only remaining candle, the priest might solemnly intone: from the psalms: *Miserere mei Deus secundum misericordiam tuam iuxta multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitates meas multum lava me ab iniquitate mea et a peccato meo munda me.*⁴ Most of the congregation wouldn't have known much Latin, but they were all familiar with the story, with it being the most solemn day of the churches year. The story was shown in the church through visual imagery in statues and windows. There was the symbolic burial of Christ in the Easter sepulchre on the north side of the chancel which would often have been made of a moveable timber frame, sometimes with carved or painted panels. In some churches there was a stone platform or niche which the wooden box could be placed in or on. A surviving example of a wooden Easter Sepulchre is to be found at St Michael's church Cowthorpe near Wetherby, Yorkshire. Throughout the week, the empty Easter sepulchre remained an object of devotion. The priest, barefoot and without his customary vestments except for his surplice, may have wrapped a crucifix and a silver pyx containing the consecrated Host in linen cloths and laid them in the Easter sepulchre. Parishioners may have followed suit, again creeping barefoot to the rood, Candles were lit on stands around the sepulchre, and a continuous watch might be kept all night. There was no mass on Holy Saturday as the congregation would be expected to reflect on the absence of Christ at that time. This time was often known in the middle ages as the 'Harrowing of Hell' and was a solemn time for Christians.

By contrast, Easter Sunday was a joyous occasion when the people would celebrate a new life or beginning and to show this, people would wear their best clothes. Sometimes this was the only time in the whole year a person would buy a new garment. On Easter Sunday morning a procession was formed to the Easter sepulchre and the rood was solemnly raised and carried triumphantly around the church with all the bells ringing and the choir perhaps singing *Cristus resurgens*, 'Christ is risen'. People often gave gifts of money to provide the wax for candles for maintaining *lumini sepulture*, or sepulchre lights. Easter Sunday services would begin at dawn, with the congregation gathering outside the church to sing hymns. Then the priest would lead them into the church, where the Easter Sunday mass would be very joyful, and the Blessed Sacrament would return. As the priest ended the mass with a blessing and the words *ite missa est*,⁵ people would be dismissed in grace and forgiveness to go and feast. After all, they had fasted and eaten no meat or eggs for the forty days of Lent, having survived on fish and whatever was available to them in that season.

One of the many traditions that people might want to engage in at Easter was collecting eggs to celebrate Jesus's resurrection. The egg was believed by many to represent new life as that is what happens with birds and some other creatures. They would collect the eggs during the forty days of Lent when you could not eat any eggs. They would boil the eggs in salt water to preserve them during this time and prevent them from hatching. At Easter, the eggs might be painted or dyed, mostly with red for the blood of Christ. The coloured eggs might be hidden from the children, who joyfully hunted them down; the

hunt symbolising the apostles searching for Jesus's tomb. Along with hunting for eggs, children celebrated the festival with family and friends. Peasants might get a feast especially if the Lord of the manor provided one for them. In 1276, Eleanor and Simon de Montfort bought 3700 eggs for their celebration, and in 1290 Edward I's accounts show that he paid to have 450 eggs decorated with gold leaf. It was common to disguise food as something else.⁶

Easter was the most important holy day in medieval England. Easter celebrated the birth of new life as well as the start of the new year and a key time in the farming year with growth of crops and greenery. Easter was a time of faith and feasting; the Catholic community would be with one another sharing all of the rituals and traditions together. This day was like Christmas is today, there was a lot of eating, drinking, celebrating, fun, gifts, dancing, music, entertainment, and above all rituals and ceremonies celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ.

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- 2 <http://www.historyofyork.org.uk/themes/medieval/the-mystery-plays>
- 3 John 15:12
- 4 Psalms 51:1-2
- 5 Go the mass is ended or literally, go you are sent. Words from the Latin mass.
- 6 <https://aethelmearcgazette.com/2015/04/05/medieval-easter-traditions/>



The Dance of the Soulmates

By Uzair Parks

I'm standing in the cell where my husband had spent the last three years of his life and despite my resolution to remain firm; I cannot hold back the tears. I succumb to emotion, allowing grief to wash over me as my hands trace the outline of a small wooden chair and a few books neatly piled atop a three legged desk.

The tiny brick room is dimly lit by a single globe suspended from the dark ceiling and there is a strong smell of bleach permeating from the stone cold floor. Even through the cold darkness and sharp pungency, I can feel his presence, even smell him. As I close my eyes I stretch out my hand and for a moment it feels as if I can reach out and grasp him from beyond the void of darkness that separates us.

It had been three years of painful separation. Three years ago he had accepted a post to re-establish a demolished school in Northern Sialkhot, Pakistan.

That was the last time I ever saw him.

And so began the madness. Endless phone calls, video conferences, back and forth email and three trips to over nineteen locations and known detention facilities. No demands were given, none of the known terrorist channels claimed responsibility...no public execution videos. Every minute seemed like an hour, every hour a day and every day a week. Then, as the last few glimmers of light faded and with the last of our contacts exhausted, the dread and despair set in as the hopelessness of the situation overcame us. His parents and siblings, friends and family had to accept the unwanted truth: Aaron was gone. But for me, he was never truly gone.

And so I chose not to move on and held on to the belief that someday, by some miracle, by some miracle, perhaps....just perhaps...

And then, three years later, this:

UN Intel picked up a trail after last month's earthquake. Someone dropped a hint of a British man being held in a detention facility in Asadabad, Afghanistan. Description matches Aaron. Like Islamabad, Afghan military have allowed us a four hour search and retrieve window. We have him Essie, I just know it. Come quickly, Paul.

But by the time we got here, the trail had gone cold. Aaron was gone, again. We learn that Aaron had been held here but then mysteriously 'vanished' a few hours ago. No accountability, no answers. It's a story we have heard before but today we don't buy into it. Paul and his team go to work. They infiltrate the remaining cells across the detention facility, they interrogate the guards, and they squeeze out as much information as they can.

I'm aware of a narrow corridor, wet floors, damp concrete walls and a red light at the end of the passage as I'm taken to the cell where he had been detained. All of the cell doors had been forcibly opened.

In an adjacent cell, a young Indian doctor tends to a man who is so heavily bandaged, but for a faint gap through which dark eyes protrude, his appearance is that of a grotesque mummy. I shudder to imagine the scars and mutilations that lay behind.

Inside my husband's prison cell, I shut my eyes and try to piece together all of the facts, but my emotions seem to block out all thought. For the moment, the facts do not matter. For the moment the comprehension of how and why and when is being deterred by one unquestionable truth: Aaron had been here.

Perhaps it's my own need for fulfilment, my own desperate need for solace that I grope around in the dark, my hands falling on every surface, every little corner. Had he touched here...had his fingers traced along the edge of this table, or this sorry excuse for a pillow? His scent was still here, I was sure of it...Why had he been held here so long? Where had he been taken? Oh God, had he been killed?

In desperation I begin foraging through the few remaining objects in the room. There are two volumes of English literature and a collection of poetry on the desk. Without thinking, I reach for the denim bound blue book on poetry: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and other lyrical ballads." On the inside cover, neatly written in black ink, I gasp in recognition of Aaron's handwriting:

"My Dear Essie. Happy Anniversary, Aaron."

Immediately below it, a magnificent pencil drawing:

Aaron had drawn a picture of a boat on a lake opposite an island with two big trees and a brilliant sunset in the background. My heart explodes as I recognise the scene.

It was our first date.



Aaron passionately believed in the idea of a soulmate, the unique counterpart that existed for each of us and by which the very essence of our beings would intertwine. The perfect partner, the deepest bond and strongest connection, Aaron held true to his belief that in the unspoken union of two such souls, there could be no greater joy.

He had surprised me with a picnic lunch along a sunset lake. We had sailed out into the middle and then to a little island on the far side, an island with two gigantic chestnut trees in the centre where we each had carved separate messages into the bark which we would never read. His reasoning was that if we were indeed soulmates, then there would be no need to read each other's messages. We would just know it.

My heart thumping in my chest, I scrutinise the drawing. With a shock of pure exhilaration I note the scribbled-down words inscribed on each of the trees and as I piece them together, a gigantic lump in my throat, I reach a startling realisation. My husband had left me a message: "What heavenly cloth doth our destiny intertwine, for I am yours and you, mine."

My hands tremble and my mind is a flurry of shock and emotion as I nervously turn the page. Below the lines:

"Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,"

Aaron had scratched out the remaining verses and added "The memory of a Cheeseburger or seven" Cheeseburger: Once again I descend into the calm and soothing comfort of nostalgia, the tears coming unbidden as I recall to memory the day Aaron proposed to me. He was always a romanticist enthralled by grand gestures of affection but outwardly hating the stereotypical romance of our time. He refused to fall under the 'that couple' banner and would mock and decry the buttered up unoriginality of 'normal behaviour'. He regarded the clichéd 'proposal' as the cardinal sin of romance, believing there to be no justification for it.

The restaurant reservation, the quiet word with the waiter, the ring slyly slipped into the champagne glass and the bended knee - for him all of these culminated in the most deplorable of romantic mockery. It was, as he called it, "The cheesiest of cheddar" Thus it was that when he eventually did propose to me, it was over dinner he had skilfully prepared. Food, he believed was one of the most intimate moments any couple could indulge in, and with his artisan hands I was treated to a most spectacular meal. Well, more precisely, with an 'artisan hand' as he had sustained a nasty fracture after falling off his bike that afternoon. Despite my insistence on helping him cook, he rather firmly sat me down at the table while he busied himself in the kitchen, waving at me with his bandaged hand like a gleeful lunatic. At the end of it I was presented with a glorious home-crafted cheeseburger, the type you would expect to see at an expensive restaurant or in glossy food magazines. A homemade ground beef patty, crusty iceberg lettuce, crispy onion rings, relish and pickle and on top of the golden sesame bun he had placed a little flagpole stick with the words: "I know its cheesy but I have placed a ring under the bun."

Please marry me Essie"



And I had married him...on condition that I would be allowed more of his glorious cooking. And so the humble cheeseburger had become the symbol of every anniversary we shared for the next seven years. "The memory of a Cheeseburger or seven"

On the next page, he had drawn a set of ten small windows, seven of them done as comic-strip style illustrations and the remaining three blank and I immediately noted the reference. Seven windows: each representing a wedding anniversary and three blank windows for the years that we had been apart.

Below these drawings he had written a small note: "It is only by a suspension of disbelief that we allow ourselves to be fully immersed within the myth and truly appreciate the enigma of the story. Then, the impossible becomes possible, the implausible plausible and the monsters in the movies 'more' real."

Aaron was not one for indulging in the social media trends of our time. He was, to coin the term, a 'romantic surrealist'; more at home with the collected works of romantic writers than with any modern interpretations, a man born out of time. He despised decadence in all of its forms and refused to allow convention to dictate the governance of his life. But of his many peculiarities, the most striking one was this: He loved monster movies. Aaron owned an extensive collection of DVDs on monsters ranging from Dracula to Frankenstein, the Mummy, the Black Lagoon creatures, Aliens and the many King Kongs and Godzillas and much more. He cherished the idea of what he called "suspended escapism" – by which one could simply leave one's brain at the door, make some popcorn and enjoy a movie. For a moment, I'm confused by the note and its meaning. Was Aaron referring to his situation?

Were the monsters a reference to his captives?

The rest of the book contains no further messages except for three quickly scribbled notes on the inner back-cover: "We made love while mummy watched" and "I'm hot. E.P" and "Frankenstein is keeping me safe."

My momentary bewilderment turns to surprise and then to shock and then to exhilaration as the sequence of puzzles begins to unravel before me. To anyone else, the cryptic nature of these last three messages would be overlooked as something bizarre, even lewd, but I and I alone, knew Aaron.

He often spoke of the secret language which lovers shared, those unspoken glances and those key words which could only be understood by two. The private joke, the hidden meaning, the message within the message. He called it "The dance of the soulmates".

"We made love while mummy watched".

The evening before Aaron left for Pakistan, we had made love on our living room couch. As our bodies bound together, wrapped in the pleasure of intimacy, we were completely unaware of the movie which had just started playing. Later, as we lay blissfully in each other's arms, Aaron noticed that the movie had been playing the whole time. "Oh no," he remarked,

"We made love while mummy watched!"

The movie had been the 1999 remake of The Mummy, one of Aaron's favourites. "I'm hot. E.P" – Imhotep. The Mummy. "Frankenstein is keeping me safe". Doctor Frankenstein.

Yes Aaron, the implausible had just become more plausible.

The monsters had just become more real.
My body shaking as the epiphany of revelation overcomes me, I stumble out of the cell,
unable to control the joyful tears, unable to contain my excitement.
I reach the adjacent cell where the young Indian doctor tends to the bandaged man.
The doctor gives me a knowing and reassuring smile and gestures towards the bed.
The bandaged man reaches for my hand and squeezes it gently.
The familiar voice that comes from beneath is full of life and hope.
"Essie!" he exclaims and I cry joyfully as the words escape me.
"Aaron!"
What heavenly cloth indeed.



THE FIVE CROSSES

by Ray E. Lipinski

Sonya stood outside Dr. Bergstrom's office thinking she was in another world, reality slowly slipping away from her. Thirty minutes later she realized she was sitting in her car with no recollection of how she got there. Damn. The cancer was still growing like Miracle Grow on weeds through her brain and all her options have been exhausted. No more chemo, no more clinical trials, no more experimental drugs. Phenylalanylserine decarboxylase cancer was her nemesis and after four years of battle, it had won. She said in the beginning that they could throw everything including the kitchen sink at her and she was not going to give up, but now she finally realized the kitchen sink and everything else in that proverbial house was gone. She was all alone and all she wanted to do was go home and recede into the darkness.

While her husband Les drove them home Sonya thought ironically at what a perfect April day it was in Texas. The Bluebonnets were blooming in their magnificence, children were playing outside laughing, chasing balloons, a mother was beaming a smile looking down at her baby carriage – all mocking her, or so it seemed, laughing at her and what would be her eventual demise. Like a floodgate bursting open, her emotions turned to bitterness, remorse and hate. She had accepted the cancer but never once thought it would beat her. She was a good person, a kind person, always helped the underdog and had fought an impressive four-year battle so far. She was a McCallum, of strong Scottish descent with warrior blood in her and most important she had finally found a close relationship with God. God was always the caring father figure in her life, replacing her pathetic, biological one who left her and her mother at age four to become a loan shark in Las Vegas. That was her reality, that was the hardest, how God had just let this happen. Nothing now mattered to her, since God did not care for her, she would bid Him farewell with one last thought. She would do this without Him, spend what time she had left with Les, her family and friends, the real things in her life.

The following months as Sonya's condition deteriorated at an alarming rate, her mental state became more forlorn. Les tried everything to comfort her and bring her solace. Other than Les, her best friend Rob was always beside her, regaling tales of their college days together, working at the same grocery store in high school and all the karaoke parties they hosted with their friends. They had been bonded soul-friends from the first time they met. Even with all the stories Rob told nothing seemed to give Sonya any peace. He and Les were at their wits end and did not know what to do. Then one day Rob stopped by the house, Sonya had now been confined to bed, finding it harder and harder to get up. Les informed Rob that Sonya was now starting to hallucinate and that most days were "bad" days. Rob walked in the room, "So how is my favorite girl doing today?" Sonya's eyes widened, she sat straight up and started laughing hysterically. "What in God's name, why are you wearing a kilt?"

"Well, the Highland Games are today, and the McCallum team is in the Caber Toss challenge." Sonya continued to laugh hysterically. Rob and Les just took a step back in shock but happy to see her beautiful smile. "That's the funniest thing I think I have ever heard."

"Well, were gonna win in honor of you my friend." Rob said, "Don't waste your time on my account my friend, go if you want to but it won't make a difference, not like God is going to care." Rob just let out a long sigh, kissed Sonya on the cheek and started singing The Parting Glass as he walked out of the room. It rained all day long at the Highland games, but Rob was in great spirits at representing Sonya and her family. In the end, Clan McCallum won two of the athletic events and covered in mud from head to foot, Rob accepted the trophy proud to bring it home for Sonya. When Rob walked up to the house, Les was outside and had been crying. They had had a big fight about God, life, death, Les' refusal to look into a fly-by-night clinic in Peru that promised "fascinating results". Rob gave him a hug, gave him his house key and told him to spend the rest of

the weekend just being by himself.

When Rob walked in her room, Sonya's face was flushed with dried tears, but she did manage to break a smile when Rob came in soaking wet. "I'm pretty sure my family tartan never looked like that, you're a mess."

"A muddy mess, so what's wrong, why did you make Les cry again?" She threw a pillow at him which just caused the caked-on mud to fly everywhere. "You're an ass" she barked. Looking down now at the muddy pillow Rob replied, "Well those stains aren't going to come out, talk to me Sonya, I told Les to stay at my house for a few days."

"I'm dying Rob, and I don't want to give up, I don't know what to do, I don't want to die, I don't want to be mad at God or hurt Les or annoy you..."

"You always annoy me girl.... what do I need to do?" Rob half smiled. "Just be here with me, talk to me, help me get my courage back."

"You've always had your courage, it's still there, maybe you just forgot you had it." Rob replied encouragingly. "You know my grandmother used to tell me the history of the MacCallum's...said we always were a warrior lot, and she used to tell me the story of the Five Crosses. I loved listening to those stories, and I would get lost in them and they made me happy. If I have to face letting go..." and taking his hand, "help me let go Rob." Rob had known Sonya's grandmother Helena very well and loved all things Scotland anyway. He knew the stories himself when he used to visit her in the hospital. "Okay friend, we'll start tomorrow."

"Thank you, and Rob, please tell the stories in a clean kilt."

It would be another two weeks before Rob could begin his stories, that following morning Sonya had a seizure and was confined to a hospital with no visitors allowed. It was now late July and Les told him to start preparing himself for the inevitable. When he walked in the room he was greeted with a "It's about damn time you got here." Rob held her gaze for a long time, holding back emotions he was barely able to contain, looking at the mirror of his friend he could barely recognize. "Well, the first thing your grandmother used to say about the MacCallum's was they always had patience." Pulling up a chair alongside the bed he began his story telling.

The Story of the Celtic Cross Banner...

The McCallum family, one of the oldest but not notorious clans in Scotland, through the centuries always held a special place in their hearts for the image of the Celtic cross. Going back hundreds of years the cross in one way or the other was there guiding the McCallum family and even in some instances saving the lives of some of its members. The first story takes place back in 1542 with Nicodemus McCallum. It was a terrible time for the kingdom. King Henry VIII had broken with Rome and creating the Church of England had abolished the Catholic religion and dissolved all the monasteries. This caused a huge upheaval throughout the British Isles but especially to the farmers in the northern lands that took up arms against the king. This infamous revolt became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace and involved "crazy Nicodemus" given that name for his loud and boisterous preaching in the streets that he was known for. Nicodemus had been born in Scotland but lived in York where the Pilgrimage started.

Regulators from King Henry's court were swift in dealing with anyone showing opposition and without trial sentenced all the main rebels to death. Nicodemus watched as several of his friends and neighbors and especially the leader, Robert Aske take the scaffold and give his life. He was determined to avenge their deaths and keep the rebellion going by carrying the symbol of the Pilgrimage, a banner with an image of the crucifixion through the streets of York. The Cumberland massacre that came a few days later, changed his mind. The innocent women and children, wives, sisters, sons and daughters of the men that were just hanged, came to retrieve their bodies. The regulators who thought the group was coming after them, systematically cut them down and as a warning to any further rebellion hung their bodies from the trees in a nearby grove. The regulators were now in pursuit of the few, including Nicodemus that were fleeing in escape. Still carrying the banner, Nicodemus had managed to make it to the border where in the village of Berwick his sister, Susanna resided. He pounded on the door to be let in as the regulators were right on his tale. His sister, seeing the banner and the approaching men, hid him in the barn. They surrounded the homestead and demanded that

Nicodemus come out. He appeared and they said they had identified him by the banner he was carrying. At once he began to wail and yell, waving his arms back and forth shouting scripture and gospel stories. Susanna knew what he was up to and started laughing, "You must have the wrong man, that's why we call him crazy Nicodemus, always thinking he's John the Baptist, hold on, I think I have the answer." Susanna disappeared into the barn and moments later reappeared. "Is this what you thought you saw?" Tucked under her arm was a folded banner. She unfolded it to reveal a worn, stained cloth with a picture of a knight kneeling down beside a huge stone Celtic cross. Our granddad carried this in the old rose war, my crazy brother is always carrying it with him, sleeps with it too, I'll sell it to you for five shillings." Maybe it was because it was late in the day and the regulators were tired and just wanted to go home or the fact that now Nicodemus in one of the best acting jobs of his life was now talking to the barn door, but they gave up their pursuit and headed back to London. From that day forward Nicodemus became a fervent church goer and instilled in his children a reverent respect for the cross and all it stood for.

"That was my grandmother's favorite one, she said old Nicodemus went on to have sixteen children." smiled Sonya.

"Ahh that's why your family reunions have hundreds of people at them." replied Rob with an arched eyebrow.

The Story of the Iron Celtic Cross...

The spring of 1668 had already been a wet and rainy season for Christopher McCallum, the third earl of Bendentisire and his two brothers Andrew and Roland. After being in Edinburgh a fortnight for securing more land grants from the higher courts he was praying he would make it to his estate in Inverness by nightfall. About noon gray clouds came rolling over the picturesque countryside of the Scottish moors followed by heavy rain. By two o'clock it was as dark as night with the wind whipping up a frenzy in all directions. The three brothers made it to the River Ness which would take them to Loch Douchfour right beside their home. They piled in a small boat and launched off to the middle of the river not realizing their mistake until it was too late. The swift currents pulled the boat faster than they could manage and they soon became aware they had no control of the craft. Their lanterns were extinguished by the now large rogue waves cresting over the sides of the boat and they were thrown about like rag dolls.

This continued for another few miles until the wooden craft hit a craig in the middle of the river and upended the boat, breaking it apart, throwing all three men up into the air. Andrew hit a jetty of rocks and was killed instantly. Roland had never known how to swim and despite Christopher's best efforts at keeping him afloat, was pulled under the merciless current of the river. The storm was only getting worse as Christopher, weeping with guilt, made it to shore and traversed into the forest. Having lost all his bearings and sense of direction he thought it best to just keep going into the dense foliage and try to find refuge. Resting on a fallen tree he held tight to his St. Christopher medal that Andrew had given him for his birthday. He prayed to the traveling saint to help him through this madness and provide safe passage.

The wind turned direction and suddenly made a high pitch noise. Leaves and wood and all types of debris were flying everywhere and through a clearing he could see a dark, cone shaped shadow barreling towards him. He had heard of cyclones, and even seen one from far away, but never this close. He ran as fast as he could as this "Finger of God" followed in pursuit. He prayed to the Trinity, to Mary to all the angels and saints as his muscles burned in pain from running so fast. Just as he was about to give up hope, he saw a familiar image. Through the low-lying clouds and blinding rain, he saw a church steeple and, on the top, almost beckoning him to follow was an iron Celtic cross. Christopher ran another 50 yards and a small cottage-like church appeared.

Christopher burst inside, bolted the door and crawled under a pew, continuing to pray, finally passing out from exhaustion. The next day he awoke to sunlight pouring through the windows and sounds of birds chirping in the distance. When he walked out, he noticed the cyclone's path came right up to the church and then it seemed to have made a sharp right sparring himself and the sacred building. He looked up at the Celtic cross and said a silent 'thank you'. Later he would have the church rededicated to the Church of St. Andrew and St. Roland and would tell his children and future generations the story of the brave McCallum brothers.

"Someday when you go to Scotland, you'll have to visit the church and light a candle for me."

"Uumm, maybe, those things cost like three dollars each." Rob said sarcastically.

"Continue with the next story, butthead," Sonya said, rolling her eyes.

The Story of the Celtic Cross Shield...

The drums were now beating in full rhythm and the vague sound of bagpipes could be heard in the distance. Casden McCallum, 2nd lieutenant of the western flank, was ready for battle. The Jacobite cause to restore the Bonnie Prince to the throne seemed to have united many of the clans, McLeod, Frasier, and of course McCallum under one banner. The victorious battles of Falkirk Muir and Prestonpans, assured them of a morning victory today. There was no prouder place for a Scotsman than on this battlefield in Culloden on that April day in 1745. Despite the courage and determination of the Jacobite's that day, they were no match for the superiority of the British reinforcements that outnumbered them three to one. Casden and the other military leaders thought their best course of action would be to charge head on into the British ranks, surprising them and catching them off guard.

They were wrong. Trudging through a muddy bog half the length of the battlefield slowed the Scottish army which caused them to lose the high ground. The British wasted no time in retaliation and unleashed all their fire power in one grand charge. Within minutes, hundreds of Scottish men were ruthlessly cut down and Casden saw nothing but a sea of redcoats coming towards his breaking flank. They would be mercilessly cut down if he did not provide a distraction. Standing on one of the battlements he screamed a battle cry which caught the attention of the red coats advance and began to follow him. His plan worked which gave his flank precious time to retreat. Casden was leading the British in circles and a few still standing Scotts bravely rode into the enemy ranks causing commotion and confusion.

A British general, Parker Doyle, who had seen Casden from the beginning and realized his strategy, chased him into the heart of the battle. Their cat and mouse game continued until Doyle dismounted Casden from his horse and the two enemies began fighting on the ground in one-on-one combat. Casden would later tell his sons and grandchildren that the general had overpowered him and had pinned him to the ground ready to deal a last deadly blow. Out of the corner of his eye, Casden saw a wooden shield in arms reach. He grabbed the shield which had the emblem of the Celtic cross etched on both sides and wielded it in front of Doyle, causing him to lose his balance. Casden threw him off and gave a swift slash with his sword and won the fight. Casden was able to rejoin the few retreating soldiers and it was always believed that his distraction that day was what gave the Bonnie Prince time to escape to the Isle of Skye and then on to France. The shield hung over the mantle at the McCallum ancestral home for generations.

"That was always my favorite story," remarked Rob.

"Of course, it is, macho men in skirts killing each other with swords, how manly..."

Pointing down at the red and black Stewart kilt he was wearing he said, "it's not a skirt it's..."

"Yes, yes, yes, you history dork, it's a piece of clothing derived from the Highlands, worn by blah, blah, blah....continue with the next story..."

Rob and Sonya both glared at each other for a moment then laughed.

"No pain meds for you today," joked Rob.

The Story of the Silver Celtic Cross...

Douglass McCallum had loved Serena O'Connor since he was a wee lad of ten years old. From attending the annual Christmas dinner given by their mutual laird to the Highland games played in the summer on Lake Tummel, it was truly love at first sight. In the small church of St. Andrew and St. Roland it was his greatest desire to make Serena his wife even though it was the farthest thing that her parents had wanted.

Despite it being 1867, it still mattered to many in keeping to your same social class. Serena was from the upper merchant class of ship builders in Edinburgh while Douglass's family were just small silversmiths. The reception dinner would be held at the McCallum home in Dornoch, more of a fortified lodge but still the grandest building in the village. The reception was bursting with music, laughter and merrymaking and Douglass noticed that

Serena's parents were the last to arrive and immediately had their noses pointed upward and a look of disdain on their faces. That was until they noticed how many nobles and their own business acquaintances that were in attendance. They had intentionally insisted on a private ceremony as not to embarrass themselves. Was there something these guests knew that the obstinate couple did not?

Douglass and Serena walked over to her parents and greeted them. They engaged in small talk until a sound of a bugle was heard outside. The crowd gathered close to the great hall and through the doorways a royal courtier entered, "Lords, Ladies, distinguished guests, Mr. and Mrs. Douglass McCallum, the Lord Chamberlain Conyngtham." At once a tall, portly man, wearing the finest powdered wig decked in the finest of gold clothiers came dashing in. Immediately the crowd bowed and curtsied as the Chamberlain moved his way through to the foursome. "Ahh Douglass, Serena... on behalf of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, I bring you her blessing and best wishes on your marriage and a life filled with happiness." Bowing again, Douglass replied "We are honored and humbled by your presence Lord Chamberlain."

"Oh, fiddlesticks now that all of THAT is over with, get me a brandy my boy and let's talk business." Douglass could hardly keep from smiling, "Of course mi Lord, but first let me introduce you to Serena's parents, William and Rachel O'Connor."

"Charmed, you must be very proud of your daughter for such a good catch, landing the best silversmith in Scotland."

"I beg your pardon?" Rachel responded in disbelief. "I'm sorry, perhaps in all of Britain, why after catching the Queen's eye over the goblets he made for me, Buckingham Palace is filled to the brim with McCallum silver, which is also why I have come my boy, the Queen herself will be there for the unveiling." Rachel looked like she was about to faint, "The unveiling?" she asked. "Your son-in-law created a silver centerpiece for the altar in the Queens Chapel inside Westminster Abbey, a beautiful, high, glorious Celtic cross, good Lord I thought you merchants kept up with what's going on in London society, McCallum silver has become a household name." The Lord Chamberlain gave Serena's parents a cast-off look and then led the newlyweds to another room where more toasts and well wishes were being made. Never again from that day did the O'Connor's ever look down on another's station in life.

"That was my favorite story," sighed Sonya.

"Of course it is, the sappy, romantic novel one," Rob replied, rolling his eyes.

The Story of the Celtic Cross Blanket...

Helena was a daddy's girl through and through, and William McCallum being a single father adhered to her every whim and treated her as a perfect princess. So when the Emphysema became chronic for William and he complained about always being cold, she knitted him the finest lap blanket her saved allowance could buy. When Prom came around it wasn't a new dress that Helena wanted, but only the heaviest wool that would keep her daddy warm. William was noted for being the lead storyteller for Clan McCallum at all the Highland games, festivals and family reunions and everyone gathered from far and wide to listen to his stories.

So of course, Helena knitted a Celtic cross in the middle of the blanket with four separate patches of smaller crosses on each side to remember all the stories of old. William was overjoyed with the gift only love could make and for the first time that Helena remembered, showed her wet eyes. His wish was to be buried with the blanket, so when the time came on a cold day in November of 1973, Helena adhered to her father's request but kept one of the squares for herself in remembrance. On her 98th birthday she gave the patch to Sonya with the express wish to make sure she would continue to tell the family stories of the McCallum legacy.

She held Sonya's hand and said "We McCallum's always looked to the cross for strength, for bravery, for perseverance. Through adversity and hopelessness that cross has always saved us, always protected us, and always will, it will always guide us to the light."



Rob had been telling the stories to Sonya over a two-week period. As he finished the last few words he looked down at his friend and began to weep. With a labored, heavy breathing, she was fading fast, a shell of her former self that the hideous cancer had eaten away. Despite all she had endured, the warrior inside of her came out. She gave one of her beautiful smiles and whispered, "Thank you." The next night she had a final surge of energy and with Rob and her family watching, Les led a slow dance with her across their bedroom floor. The following morning, she passed.

At the funeral Rob would give one of the three eulogies celebrating Sonya's remarkable life. Les thanked him for all that he did and from his pocket took out a worn crocheted square. "What's this?" asked Rob. It's the patch that Helena made for her father that she gave to Sonya all those years ago." Rob stared down at the knitted cross and looked at it in disbelief, "Sonya said she couldn't find it, I looked everywhere for it last week, all over the house and never found it." Les pulled Rob into a hug, both men sobbed.

"Just before...she left, she said she finally felt at peace, was ready to let go and was going to follow 'that old Celtic cross' maybe it found her." Rob looked up at the big bright blue sky and smiled, another McCallum, another cross, another story, to tell another day.

Dedicated to the memory of Sonya McCallum Harp



Passover

BY JEREMY KAUFMAN

I miss my big family Passovers. In my family, the three most important holidays are Passover, Thanksgiving, and Hanukkah. But the only one that held deep spiritual meaning my whole life has been Passover.

I grew up hearing the story of Exodus every year. And in case you never had the chance to celebrate Passover with a Jewish family, I want you to know that it's not a holiday about celebrating dead Egyptians or about how awesome Jews are. It's a truly magical experience without any pretense at the supernatural.

It is beyond genius that for thousands of years Jews have celebrated a holiday where you are told that you are present at the moment of the story. You are asked to put yourself into the shoes of a Hebrew slave. This is done through saying prayers and telling the story but also by using various foods as ritual objects to be interacted with using your senses. Salt water to represent the tears of the slaves. Matzoh (unleavened bread) to represent what the slaves ate as they escaped because they didn't have time to wait for their bread to rise. Charoset (a mix of wine, apples, and nuts) to symbolize the mortar the slaves used to build monuments to pharaoh. Maror (bitter herbs aka horseradish) to represent the bitter tears of slavery, and on and on. It is a presentation of shapes and colors, and you eat these symbols. You dip your finger in your wine glass and make a little dab on your plate, one for each of the ten plagues. It is a way to immerse yourself in the story using all of your senses.

It is not a story that merely celebrates a Jewish victory. It is not a story of celebrating the deaths of ancient Egyptians. It is a story of justice and change and progress. But it is truly, I believe, where the thirst for justice that has been so prevalent among Jews for centuries comes from.

Every year, we retell the story, and the message is always there, waiting to be heard again: until everyone is free, no one is free....

“Oh, my son. They were only slaves.”

That line from the story's retelling in the movie Prince of Egypt is the harsh lesson we keep needing to learn. Moses was just another royal spoiled brat before he learned of his origins. Then, watching the same Hebrew slaves he had watched suffer his whole life, he suddenly saw them as equals. He suddenly saw them as suffering. He suddenly saw how he was part of the machine keeping them in bondage.

This is why the term “woke” is unhelpful and toxic. There is no final destination of woke. We are all waking up. Little by little. Piece by piece. This was a moment of Moses waking up and seeing what was right in front of his eyes all along.

The story of Moses is one of the greatest in the world. I say that not as a Jew, but as a lover of myths from around the world. And in this moment, in the crossroads we find ourselves as

Americans, it might be one of the most important stories to put ourselves in. Because it's all of our stories right now.

Right now, various Americans are living under oppression. Others are living in fear of the law, though they have done nothing wrong. Others are watching over their shoulders, waiting to deal with a confrontation with someone who means them harm because they are Black, because they are Asian, because they are Latino, because they are Jewish, because they are Arab, because they are Muslim, because they are gay, because they are lesbian, because they are transgender, because they are visibly non-binary. Because they are women of any color.

Right now, things are changing for the better, and that means that the forces of evil and ignorance and hatred are pushing back harder than in living memory for all of us who hold no memories of the years before the Civil Rights marches of the 1960's. This is by design. This is what a system of oppression and confusion and hatred does when it realizes it is in danger of being dismantled. Until everyone is free, no one is free.

Ask yourself who you are in the story or Exodus. Are you journeying to freedom? Are you assisting others to freedom? Are you keeping others from freedom? Are you looking the other way at those who are being beaten by the taskmasters? Are you the silent Egyptian who says nothing? In the end, does the reason behind your silence really mean anything at all?

May we run through this moldy prison, breaking locks, opening doors, letting the sunshine in.

Freedom isn't the ability to purchase particular goods or say awful things to your neighbor.

Freedom is only two things: 1. a place in your mind where no one can harm you, untouched or unshackled by the poisonous delusions of your society, and 2. The ability to move through your world, unharmed emotionally and physically and financially when you are playing by the same rules as everyone else, instead of living under unearned scrutiny and the harshest of penalties for violating unseen codes that only apply to you.

We are all Moses, waking up to the horrors we have been blind to. We are all Moses, awake for quite some time, trying to lead slaves to freedom. We are all the Hebrews, frightened and confused and trapped in a story far greater than our understanding.

Otherwise we are the taskmaster, or Moses looking on at the taskmaster, undisturbed and carefree. In the end, these roles are not different from each other enough to matter. They are the same. Until everyone is free, no one is free.

Post-Script: If you are not Jewish, you should not be celebrating Passover unless it is at a Jewish person's house with their family. An even bigger affront is holding a Seder as a Christian and putting Christ anywhere into the Passover story or ritual. It is not a holiday about Christ at all. Inserting Him into Passover is deeply hurtful and insulting to Jews. Please be respectful about this. Imagine Muslims celebrating Easter and saying that Easter is ultimately about the coming of Muhammad, then when confronted saying that Jesus is important to Muslims too. Muslims don't do that. Please follow their lead.

Springtime Gallows

by Leah Fisher

"Come with me," came the call
which hit my ears but ne'er to stall
the last of my departure.

The open door, the windows past
through the yard to home at last
and blessed gates wide open.

For once was peace and then was war
and here upon the forest floor
the virgin snow laid silent.

Prick my feet, my soles worn through
the bite of cold that warns me to
remember thy soul's winter.

Perhaps a day, perhaps a year
I've lost my count of seasons here
yet once the springtime hallowed.

Consider not thy soul's distress
but wrap thyself in righteousness
to cure thy heart's resentment.

Now the snow, which stung my skin
finds itself at rest again
my soul removed from wand'ring.
For there was one which hunted me
and there was one which found me free
and held my heart to silence.

And when my God shall beckon me
up from the cold ground set me free
then shall my heart be ransomed.

And when at last upon that day
my Lord returns then I shall say
with joy I followed after.

Easter in Narnia and Middle Earth

BY RICHARD KEANE

Although the reader may be more familiar with Christmas in Narnia, in relation to Christian festivals in C. S. Lewis's fantasy, arguably Easter resonates the most when exploring Christian themes. The same is also true of the work of Lewis's fellow Inkling, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. In both pieces of epic fantasy, there is a Christ-like figure who sacrifices himself to save others. Lewis's world was a direct analogy, whereas Tolkien demonstrated that we all have Christ within us. Given that Easter is upon us, coupled with the future adaptations of Lewis and Tolkien's world's, now is the time to discuss the importance of the Crucifixion and Resurrection in Narnia and Middle Earth.

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan is the creator of the world. He first appears in *The Magician's Nephew*, where he is described as a 'huge, shaggy and bright' lion. His first act is to sing 'by which he had called up the stars and the sun ... and as he walked the valley grew green with grass'. This is a clear symbolism of Aslan being God, in direct reference to how God created the world in Genesis. Another character who is there at creation was Jadis the White Witch, whose satanic purpose in life is to tempt others, and plot for power. Aslan and Jadis would proceed to have many struggles between good and evil, culminating in the novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Here, Jadis had convinced Edmond to unwittingly join her cause by betraying his family, believing that his betrayal is enough for her to cling onto power. Aslan understands far better the events about to unfold, since 'though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back ... she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack, and Death itself would start working backwards.' Aslan had just sacrificed himself to save Edmond, and indeed the whole of Narnia, just as Christ did on the Cross for humanity. Perhaps the most important part of the above quote is 'when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead'. This is precisely the nature of Christ's death on the Cross, since during the eucharist, He is acknowledged to have been a 'pure victim... spotless victim'.

After Aslan's sacrifice, Narnia returned to its peaceful, prosperous and happy days, under the reigns of the four child monarchs, and the end of the long winter. This does not mean that evil was completely eradicated from Narnia, as seen in later novels such as *Prince Caspian* and *The Last Battle*; but thanks to Aslan's eternal sacrifice, Narnians had a chance for eternal salvation. Just like the long winter represented the time before Christ, and Jadis represented Satan; Narnia after Aslan's death and resurrection symbolises the world after Christ's death and resurrection. Evil still exists, and humanity and Narnians alike are fallen creatures, but we have been saved, because a pure and spotless victim was killed.

Whereas Lewis's creation used Aslan as an analogous comparison with Christ, Tolkien's legendarium is not so precise in terms of a character who was directly like Christ. That does not mean, however, that none of the characters had Christ-like qualities. Notably Gandalf's fight with the Balrog was not a vainglorious battle, but a necessary one to save the fellowship, and one which had deep Christian connotations. The Balrog is described as 'a great shadow; in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe; yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it'. It is one of the beasts created by Morgoth, who Tolkien explained was 'satanic', meaning that the Balrog itself is symbolic of the fallen Angels. This is suggestive that Gandalf's role was similar to that of St Michael, after he cast Lucifer out of God's Kingdom. After all, Gandalf was one of the Maia, Angels from the Undying Lands, sent to save Middle Earth.

However, his resurrection after the fight in Moria implies that he was closer to Christ himself, than St Michael. The Tolkien expert David Day writes that 'the wizard's spirit was resurrected as Gandalf the White, a radiant being no weapon could harm'. His resurrection at least, therefore, was suggestive of Jesus's resurrection at Easter. Gandalf's story may not have been that of Aslan, since he did not create Middle Earth, but Tolkien still wrote him as a character who was partially inspired by Christ. This Christian inspiration is also emulated in the lives of other characters in the Lord of the Rings, particularly Aragorn and Samwise. Aragorn is a reluctant King who is willing to lay down his life to save others. For instance, after the breaking of the fellowship, he convinces Legolas and Gimli to help him search for the missing hobbits, despite being heavily outnumbered. He was more than willing to risk his life to save two 'halflings', since every creature, however small, has worth. This is deeply Christian, since self-sacrifice is arguably the greatest act any Christian can do. Samwise also demonstrates tremendous courage when carrying the ring, which metaphorically represents sin and evil, and not getting tempted by its power, unlike almost every other character. The cross he had to bear ultimately involved carrying Frodo, with the ring, to the Crack of Doom. Despite coming from such humble roots, as a gardener, Sam was the one who assisted the ring bearer in defeating Sauron. Both Sam and Aragorn therefore go through self-sacrificial journeys, where they carry huge burdens, akin to that of Christ on the Cross. They demonstrate therefore that we all have the potential to be like Christ. Lewis also has characters, beyond Aslan, who bear great burdens. Peter especially shows Christian virtues, since like Aragorn, he is a reluctant King who is willing to lay down his life for others. Ultimately, both Lewis and Tolkien had references to Easter and Christ's Passion in their works of epic fantasy. Lewis explicitly used Aslan as a direct analogy to Christ. As the son of the Emperor Beyond the Seas, Aslan lays down his life to defeat evil 'in a traitor's stead', ensuring that 'Death itself would start working backwards'. Tolkien also had a character who was resurrected, in Gandalf. Gandalf's journey appears to have been influenced by a combination of St Michael and Jesus. Beyond Gandalf, Sam and Aragorn are at times like-Christ, as they bear their crosses with dignity and courage. What both Lewis and Tolkien illustrate is that man has the potential to rise beyond his fallen state, and to live like Christ on Earth.





Creating Beauty: A Homemaker's Mission



BY MARY ELLEN BARRETT

I am hesitant to declare it out loud for fear of jinxing it, but I think spring is finally here. Each time I have thought that spring had arrived in the last couple of weeks our northeastern climate has slapped the area with another frigid windy day dashing my dreams of cotton blouses and flip flops.

I am particularly impatient this year because we have embarked upon a long overdue renovation of the backyard. This renovation is in response to a particularly fierce nor'easter that swept through here last fall toppling four large trees and crushing a shed in our yard. The mess was enormous and as a result four more trees had to be taken down as they had split or had other damage making them unsafe.

Since the yard was torn to shreds it seemed like a good time to focus on making it look better. For years, our yard had attracted children from miles around due to the big pool, zip line, swing set with climbing ropes and a trampoline. Yes, my yard was a death trap, but it was a popular one. None of this is conducive to elegant living though and what ever seed we scattered in the hopes of some grass or what vegetables and flowers I tried to coax out of the ground generally ended up trampled by running feet of both human and canine variety. The whole thing was a muddy mess that had me throwing my hands up in exasperation most days, declaring the universal mother complaint about not being able to have nice things.

All of that is about to change. The pool, zip line and swing set are gone. The trampoline is on its way out and I finally have a crowd of older kids more interested in going to the beach in the summer than staying home to destroy my yard.

This is my year. The landscapers have cleared the yard, planted grass and now I can create the kind of beauty that my soul has longed for. Does that sound dramatic? It should not. I believe that God created us for beauty and that when we create beautiful surroundings, listen to beautiful music, contemplate beautiful art, or even wonder at the beauty in the people we see we are drawing ourselves closer to God. In this culture that celebrates the crude, the crass and the ugly it does seem odd to say that beauty is sacred, but it is, and we should be doing our best to create it, even in small pockets of our lives.

The warm breezes of spring, the crocuses and daffodils peeking out from the wet earth and the newness of the Resurrection are like a siren call to many homemakers to shake off the winter blues, let the sunshine in and beautify their homes. It is one of those long held traditions that women start cleaning in a frenzy at this time of year clearing out the dust and grime that all that sunshine you let in showed up so dramatically whilst the husbands search in vain for the item, they just set down right there a minute ago but you have dusted it and put it away.

I have spent a lot of time lately reflecting on home keeping, beauty and the woman's role in creating it. There have been many articles online lately (I believe due to Women's History Month which was March) both pro and con regarding a woman concerning herself with all things home. A woman staying home to care for her family, raise her children, create a warm and inviting atmosphere in the home has been controversial for the entire length of time I have been doing it (twenty-six years) but since the mandatory quarantines have sent woman back into the home, even if they are working from there, there has been an epiphany among the blue check Twitterari that being home is better. These women who focused much of their lives on their careers have now spent time with their children, baked bread, worn house dresses, cleaned closets, refinished furniture, planted gardens, read books, and experienced the freedom of being able to put your family first and order your days thusly. So many of these high-powered career focused women are lamenting the end of the quarantines and the return to the office that is pending in the next few weeks. This surprises them, this feeling of loss. It should not surprise them, and that it does is sad. Women are wired for care. To care for their husbands, children and homes is natural and when allowed to settle into that role without guilt (and it took a mandatory lockdown to remove that guilt) they found happiness and peace even in times as trying and stressful as these in which we live.

This year, as best as I could, I have created some beauty in the house, a much-needed kitchen renovation, some new flooring, if it stood still long enough, I painted it, and now it is time for the outside. I am a firm believer that things in my life generally are better when begun with prayer, so my priority is a Mary garden. In medieval times most flowering plants had names that honored the Blessed Mother however after the Reformation took hold many were re-named. It has become popular in traditional Catholic circles to revive the tradition of planting a garden centered around a statue of the Virgin consisting of plants that honor her, so this May my newly dug flower gardens will be planted with Lady's Slipper, Marigolds, Lady's heart, Mary's Love of God, and Our Lady's shoes. There will also be John Paul II rose bushes, and Our Lady of Guadalupe roses. The statue of Our Lady that my children gave me a few years ago will be surrounded by beauty, children, and canines notwithstanding. I am looking forward to that beauty, a place of peace and calm in a turbulent world.

'Let everything in creation draw you to God. Refresh your mind with some innocent recreation and needful rest, if it were only to saunter through the garden or the fields, listening to the sermon preached by the flowers, the trees, the meadows, the sun, the sky, and the whole universe. You will find that they exhort you to love and praise God; that they excite you to extol the greatness of the Sovereign Architect Who has given them their being.'

-St. Paul of the Cross



HOW THE SYMBOL OF ROMAN CRUELTY BECAME THE SYMBOL OF GOD

by Isfar Josef Skrinjar

The Christian cross, recalling the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is probably the most internationally recognisable cultural symbol on the planet. And yet, very few people in the West know about its history.

Crucifixion is believed to be the most famous form of brutal punishment in the history of mankind. This important method of capital punishment was invented by Persians in 300-400BC and later adopted by the Romans, where it became the symbol of Roman supremacy.

What the cross symbolised for Rome or those who are subject to Rome - was the sheer power of the greatest empire on the face of the earth, to torture to death anyone who opposed its rule. The crucifixion was the archetypal punishment for the rebellious slave, and the reason it was so horrible was because it was physically excruciating. According to modern physiologists, someone nailed to a crucifix with their arms stretched out on either side could expect to live for no more than 24 hours. To stay alive on the cross, one had to pull himself up and down in order to breathe, as he would feel the metal scraping against his bone all the time, and birds would flock around his head as they pecked his eyes out. And the worst thing of all was that the guilty person had to be naked, advertising his own humiliation in front of the public, and showcasing the power of Roman authorities that were putting him to death.

So the idea that this symbol of all symbols should, in a sense, have kind of been upended that from degradation to the notion of triumph, from humiliation to glory, from death to life, and more than that someone who suffers the death of a slave turns out to be the creator of all humanity is miraculous. What it means in the long run is that it gives dignity to people who previously would not have been afforded dignity by anyone. And we mustn't forget that Jesus Christ came to us not as a conqueror, but as a man nailed to a cross. This embeds at the heart of the West the idea that the oppressed can triumph over the oppressor, and that a victim can indeed become the victor. In the context of Roman culture, it is hard to emphasise just how radical this concept is, and therefore just how much of a detonation it was under the assumptions of Roman power. And the measure of how vast that radical explosion was is now, by and large, we tend to take for granted that the lowest of the low do have dignity, and the last can become the first.



Only the Power of Creation...

Life, Death, and Rebirth in 'Legend'

BY KAT CLEMENTS

Author's Note: There are several cuts and versions of the film Legend. My comments and impressions are based on the American theatrical release, which is the shortest version, running only 89 minutes, and features a soundtrack by German electronica band Tangerine Dream. To my knowledge, this version is only available on VHS tape or as part of the Ultimate Edition Blu-ray which includes the Theatrical and Director's cuts.

Please note that this article contains spoilers for the movie!

Legend is one of those underrated gems of 1980s fantasy films. Released in 1985 and directed by Ridley Scott, it is a dark fantasy of epic proportions that combines both a dream-like atmosphere with some very powerful primal themes. On the surface, it may look like a run-of-the-mill fairy tale about the battle between the forces of light and dark. But we're going to delve a little deeper because it's a bit more complicated than that.

Many other fantasy films exhibit a dualistic struggle between good and evil, with good ultimately triumphing and presenting the obligatory happy ending. But Legend showcases a more complex and cyclical conflict of life, death, and rebirth. The story begins in a beautiful fairy forest where it seems like nothing bad could ever happen. But shadows lurk along the edges as a goblin hunting party is dispatched by the demon known only as "Darkness" (played by Tim Curry) to kill the unicorns that protect this realm of springtime. And it is the temptation of an innocent that gives the goblins an opportunity to fulfill their mission.

Jack (played by Tom Cruise) lives in the forest and takes his girlfriend Princess Lili (played by Mia Sara) to see the unicorns. Despite Jack's warning not to touch them, Lili goes to the unicorns and pets the stallion. This distraction gives the goblins the chance to shoot the stallion with a poisoned dart. The unicorns run away, but neither Jack nor Lili realize what has actually taken place. The goblins pursue the poisoned stallion and cut off his horn.

This plunges the world into instant winter, the descent from the state of Life into one of Death. Fairies and humans and other forest creatures may still be alive for the moment, but if winter never abates, they won't be for long. In many ways, this parallels the Biblical story of the Fall: a woman is tempted to do something forbidden and the rest of the world pays the price for it.

However, unlike Adam and Eve, Jack and Lili do not accept this state of affairs. They each begin separate quests to right this wrong and restore the land. And although the unicorn stallion is dead, the fact that the sun still rises over the frozen wasteland proves that the mare is still alive, which means there is hope. This does not please Darkness and he berates his goblin henchmen for this oversight. When one goblin protests, saying that, "It's just a female, lord. She has no power," Darkness responds, "Only the power of Creation... As long as one unicorn walks this earth, my power is not complete."

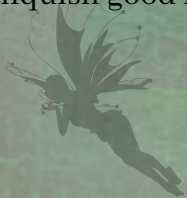
But the power of Darkness and Death is strong. When both Lili and the unicorn mare are captured by the goblins, all hope appears to be lost. Still, Jack persists in his pure-hearted quest to free them while Darkness seeks to corrupt Lili, tempting her with jewels, gowns, and promises of power if she becomes his queen. Yet Darkness sows the seeds of his own downfall by pursuing Lili. He is so confident of his power, that he cannot conceive her being able to resist him. And because Darkness focuses on Lili to the exclusion of all else, Jack and his fairy allies are able to sneak into the very heart of the evil fortress.

Here, Jack's steadfast devotion to the Light and Life is given the final test. The unicorn mare is about to be sacrificed, which will grant Darkness dominion forever. Lili appears to have willingly joined forces with Darkness and wields the knife that will slay hope forever. Jack has a clear shot with his arrow to strike Lili down and his allies urge him to do so. But Jack still loves Lili and chooses to place his trust in her one more time. He fires his arrow at Darkness just as Lili severs the chains that hold the mare captive. Enraged, Darkness strikes Lili down, and the final battle ensues. Jack and his allies finally manage to push Darkness into the void with sunlight and retrieve the stolen horn.

With Darkness cast into the void, the stage of Rebirth can begin. The unicorn stallion's horn is restored along with his life. Spring returns with the stallion's power and the signs of Darkness's domain vanish. Jack revives Lili from her death-like sleep and they reaffirm their love which has overcome all obstacles, temptations, corruption, and strife. All is well that ends well.

But this is where Legend does something that I had not seen in a fantasy story up to this point. It undercuts the usual tale of good vs evil present in the majority of fantasy. In most stories, the heroes win the day and evil is defeated permanently. But during the final battle, as he is about to be flung into the void, Darkness tells Jack: "You think you have won! What is light without dark? What are you without me? I am a part of you all. You can never defeat me. We are brothers eternal!" And in the final shot of the film, as Jack and Lili run hand in hand into the sunset while the fairies and unicorns look on, there is an overlay of Darkness laughing.

The closing image of Legend makes it very clear that while Jack and Lili won the battle, they have not won the war. Darkness is a fundamental part of the world and can only be stopped for a little while. It can be defeated, driven back, sealed away and forgotten. But it cannot be permanently destroyed. It is an endless conflict cycling from Life to Death and back again through Rebirth, from the innocent life of Lili and Jack's spring, to the frozen death and temptations of Darkness's reign, to the rescue and rebirth of the unicorns. While other tales and media explore this idea with greater depth and subtlety, I credit Legend as being the first to introduce me to this concept. And yet, while good may not permanently vanquish evil, neither can evil vanquish good forever. The dark winter may last a long time, but in the end, spring will be reborn in light.



The Priest's Passion

by Father Gerard Hatton

"When you see me standing up there, mumbling to myself and apparently taking no notice of you, all dressed up in silk like a great pin cushion, you mustn't think of me as something quite apart, at a distance from you, uninterested in your feelings and your concerns. On the contrary, I am standing there like a great pin cushion for you to stick pins into me. All the things you want to pray about, all the things you want for yourself, and all the worries that are going on at home are part of the prayer that I am saying, and I couldn't prevent them being part of my intentions in saying the Mass, even if I wanted to."

Monsignor Ronald Knox said this in a Sermon to school girls over 60 years ago. I am struck by the power of these words and how relevant they are to this day. The priesthood has often been viewed, I have come to realise, as a man-made institution which takes away from the "royal priesthood" of all Believers, with abuse, sexism, financial irregularities, dressing up in silk, and a lack of supernatural grace. With such an understanding in mind, it is hard to stand up for such an institution. But the fact is that we need to delve deeper to find a Christ centred priesthood.

At the beginning of April, we observed Holy Thursday and the commemoration of the Lord's Last Supper, which is one of the most important, complex, and profound days in the life of our Church. This feast reminds us of when we were given the institution of the Holy Eucharist as the true body and blood of Jesus Christ and the institution of the sacrament of the priesthood. It is through this sacrament that He is brought to us, and from it we get an insight into holy charity. We are called to give of ourselves which is the true nature of sacrifice. The words do this in "remembrance of me" are words that must have confused the disciples, as they already were in the midst of the Passover and it's memory of the freedom of children of Israel. But they were given a new task in remembering, which only makes sense through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, which flows from this meal.



Remember, God doesn't work in our time, so the first bread and wine did become the first Eucharist and they did receive his Body, Blood Soul and Divinity. Just two weeks before Holy Thursday on Passion Sunday (5th Sunday in Lent), we heard the words of Psalm 42 2-3: "Do me justice, O God, and fight my fight against a faithless people; from the deceitful and impious man rescue me. For You are my God and my strength. Send forth Your light and Your fidelity; they shall lead me on and bring me to Your holy mountain, to Your dwelling-place."

This portion of the Psalm helps us to understand the mission of Christ and His work of salvation, explained for us and given to us in the Holy Mass. From the words of that Psalm till Vespers on Easter Sunday, it offers a lens through which to see the Holy Mass in slow motion. For who is the central figure of the Mass but Jesus Christ, just as real today, as on that Passover evening? The Church and the Holy Mass is all about Christ. Everything we do, as Saint Paul says, is to preach Christ crucified, and use words if we must. We should be His charity to the world or change the word charity for love. This is the truer nature of the priesthood. This is how we are rediscovering as priests and people.

There is work to be done, and the priest has to get his hands dirty. He cannot simply be a sacramental machine, moving around from church to church, offering the mass and confessions with appointments. He needs to be involved in the salvation of his parish. He cannot leave his people without a constant shepherd. He has to be there as Christ requires it. He has to be involved in the beauty of liturgy and life which flows from it. The priest should be seen praying the rosary with the people, interacting with their families, and wearing his cassock on the streets and in the supermarket. He has to teach the truth of the Church and lead by example of Christ. He must spend hours in the confessional, offering the Sacrament of Penance to those who may be reticent at first.



The road will be a weary one and there will be power struggles amongst the people. The devil will attack, and a priest's Marian devotion should be very strong, placing his tears and flowers at the feet of his Holy Mother. He has to conform himself to constant prayer, read Holy books and the Scripture, and go to confession regularly himself. He should keep company with holy people in his parish and go out of his way to find the lost in his area. He should learn to use the technology available and ask people to help him with it. Asking himself daily what can he do? How can he give of himself like Christ and offer the sacrifice which is himself?

The power to carry out all these duties is found in the Holy Eucharist. It is the nuclear power for Catholics, and when we have our spiritual eyes open to that truth, we realise again and again the power of Christ in the Holy Mass and our need for Him and his saving powers in this dark land. It is only through the cross that the promise of the Last Supper is accomplished, but through the Mass, it is brought to us in the fadeless light of the Resurrection. We can't ask for anything better than that, as priests or people. Yes, sometimes I do feel irrelevant, overlooked, misunderstood, odd and so many other things. But I am glad that's why God chose me to be his pin cushion, so that I can go to the Altar of God to be stabbed with thousands and thousands of pins of peoples prayers, joys and broken hearts as he is brought to the world by my unworthy hands again and again to be given to us daily as our supersubstantial bread (Matthew 6:11). I end with the prayer the angel taught the children of Fatima. If a priest faithfully prays and acts this out on behalf of himself, his people, he and they will surely fall more deeply in love with God, the mysteries of faith, and the salvation of the world: "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love Thee! I beg pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love Thee. Amen."



Brother Lawrence and the Fourfold Cure

by Sean Earner

"You can not conquer God, nor an angel, nor a philosopher."

— From *The Ways of Brother Lawrence* by Joseph de Beaufort

The coming of Easter is not just the celebration of a past historical event, but the reaffirmation of a divine life, a heavenly kingdom, which is with us now. The perennial wrangling over the proof or lack of proof for Christ's rising from the dead, as interesting as it may be for the curious, misses an important point. The vain struggle to reduce the miraculous to the natural that can be known or not known with a scientific certainty does violence to the majesty of the spirit that dwells in the eternal present of Revelation. The victory over the grave means nothing if it is not in us, with us, and for us. He rose in vain if we do not partake in His bounty, making Him part of the whole of our life. An empty tomb must also be free of the old man of sin that we bring with us; otherwise, the proclamation of the Gospel is done for naught.

But what is the resurrected life?

To understand better what the dispensation of Christ promises, we must excavate the intellectual and cultural genealogies that prepare the way for the Incarnate Word. In a sense, this Christian vision continues and builds upon the debates about the blessed life that dominated the spiritual landscape of the ancient Mediterranean, when religions and philosophies vied to provide the most adequate remedy for the sadness that plagued the human condition. The ironic but earnest Socrates had linked the pursuit of wisdom to the pursuit of the best life that went beyond the mass of controversy over empirical facts or conventional poetic fables to the inner citadel where we, knowing ourselves, kept watch with God. The various philosophical schools and mystery cults sought to find the answer to this pressing question through various combinations of logic, mysticism, speculation, science, and ritual.

One of the most original, and controversial attempts to serve as the Physician to humanity was the Epicurean school, also known as the Garden because of the location where the founder Epicurus taught. From antiquity on, the Epicureans have been caricatured as atheists and hedonists, and certainly their thorough materialism makes them far less amenable to Christian appropriation than Plato's idealism. Also, their denial of providence makes them, unlike the pious lovers of destiny that made up the Stoics, less obvious candidates for the title of naturally born Christians than Seneca or Epictetus. But both accusations are unjust.

The Epicureans did believe pleasure was the chief good of life. But this goal was not accurately summed up in the pursuit of crude (or for that matter, refined) bodily lust for scintillating excess. Instead the Epicureans defined this highest pleasure as the absence of pain derived from moderating desire and removing all fear. To want little and depend on little, not addiction to the extremes of sensation, was the royal road to happiness in this life. They were, in a way, Occidental Buddhists, but with a realist ontology of the world. They did not reject all as illusion, but held fast to the solidity of life even as they sought their freedom from it. Therefore, Epicureans were not contemptible debauchees but ascetics who could rival the saints in self-denial. As for the charge that they did not believe in the divine, it would be more accurate to say that they preached a purer and higher conception of the gods than what was found in the context of Greek polytheism or, for that matter, of most cultures.

The divine beings spoken of by the Epicureans existed in a blissful state between the worlds, needing nothing, wanting nothing, neither causing harm or wishing to cause injury on anyone, free of vengeance or envy towards mortal creatures. They did not interfere with the governance of nature, but the vision of their blessed life raised up all men who opened themselves to it. To honor such beings, only a disinterested piety was adequate, and this love of the gods without expecting them to love you in return was a consistent teaching of the Epicurean school. Such devotion did not drag the divine down to earthly things and made all who practiced it more like the deities it beheld. Forming culturally revolutionary communities open to women, slaves, and non-Greeks (a prefigurement of the Christian ecclesia), the Garden thus spread such teachings that lifted men from the pig sty of all too human sorrows and fixations and gave them a freedom no king or polis could take away.

As summed up by one of Epicurus's chief later Syrian disciples, Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110 – 40/35 BC) as the tetrapharmakos (the fourfold cure), which goes.

Don't fear god,
Don't worry about death;
What is good is easy to get,
What is terrible is easy to endure



Diogenes of Laeritus presented the rationale for each respective counsel in the following manner:

1. A happy and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness
2. Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us.
3. The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.
4. Continuous pain does not last long in the body; on the contrary, pain, if extreme, is present for a short time, and even that degree of pain which barely outweighs pleasure in the body does not last for many days together. Illnesses of long duration even permit an excess of pleasure over pain in the body.

To many this would seem far from the Gospel, even irredeemably blasphemous. Much of what calls itself Christian would appear to be irreconcilable with such a message. But to those who take seriously the ways of the saints and blessed in the Church as interpreters of God's will, a way of mutual understanding and harmony between Christianity and the teachings of elevated philosophy, if not fusion, can be reached.

One such holy man whose life affected this bridge between the two discourses was Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a Discalced Carmelite Friar. Brother Lawrence lacked all scholarly accomplishment but he could defeat with the peace of an extinguished will the subtlety of secular wise men and theologians alike. Brother Lawrence lived a life of light sheltered in obscurity. He hasn't been honored with the title of Servant of God, let alone that of Saint. But to those who pass his memory on from his own 17th century to our own despairing age, he is a font of living water that fills without satiety, a fire that inflames without burning. Born of French peasant stock in 1614, and baptized Nicolas Herman, from a young age the future Brother Lawrence saw the extremes of life, and the fragility of all worldly things. Joining the French army out of desperation, he participated as a minor player in the European cataclysm known as the Thirty Years War. He was even captured at one point and almost executed as a spy, but saved by means of his courageous stance in the face of those who would kill him. It was during his time as a soldier that Brother Lawrence saw a tree withered by the winter and was struck with the serene thought that just as this tree would be brought back to life by the coming spring, the sinful heart of a man could be rescued from death by the grace of God.



This precious memory remained with him as a blessing for the rest of his life. He was eventually wounded in battle, causing him to be lame. It is thought that his physical wound, and the more unseeable wounds of war, made him recall the deeper sickness of the soul. As his search for God deepened, he joined the Discalced Carmelites in 1640 at the age of 25. He lived afterwards, in strong contrast to his youth, a highly uneventful life. He mainly worked in the kitchen and mended shoes, in addition to the regular duties of his status as Friar. But despite being nothing that would impress the average visitor of the priory, he began to assemble a circle of spiritual admirers of all classes and backgrounds, from fellow plebeians to the noted theologian Archbishop Fenelon himself. He died at the age of 77 on February 12, 1691, with little fanfare. But by then he had become a bond of the connection between the high and the low, the simple and the intellectual. Little formed by book learning himself, Brother Lawrence had Christianized the infidel philosophy in the air of his day and had made the faith something that an increasingly "enlightened" epoch could find both relatable and genuinely challenging. One can sum up Brother Lawrence's way almost exactly as if it was a lived interpretation and application of the Epicurean tetrapharmakos through the universal interpretive key of Christ: As a Christian sage, Brother Lawrence strove to not fear God's judgement, to not fear death, to find good easy to do, and not to be worn down by evil. He had always been governed by love with no other interest, never worrying whether he would be damned or saved (Conversations Section #8)

For several years, Brother Lawrence became convinced of his own damnation. Today, in an epoch of greater spiritual dryness, he would have striven with the fear of mere nothingness after the grave. But the fear of reprobation was a common spiritual trial in that day, when predestination, for better or worse, was taken more seriously by all branches of Western Christianity. Only some had been chosen for salvation; most were not. Facing the gravity of this stark contrast between the elect and the reprobate, and the mathematical probability that you were more likely to be one of the latter, could lead to a living nightmare. Lawrence wrestled with the darkness that he confused with God for what must have been unending mental epochs. But when he made a breakthrough: He would rejoice that He could love God now in this life, and pay no heed for what would come. Through being loyal to God as God, and not as a judge who gave out rewards and punishments, Brother Lawrence saved himself from living spiritual death. By purifying what he expected from his Lord, he entered into the inner freedom that made him a worthy son of the divine nature. Lawrence looked his Father in the eye, and did not flinch.

"[Brother Lawrence said] that he thought neither of death nor of his sins, nor of paradise, nor of hell, but only of doing little things for the love of God, since he was not capable of doing great things. Other than that, whatever happened to him was God's will, and he was at peace with that."



Not fearing God, death had no sting for Brother Lawrence. Neither hoping for heaven nor dreading hell, the end of life meant nothing ominous to him. For a man of the 17th century, this covered the most pressing questions about what we could expect after this life. All things revealed to him the presence of his God. To know and feel this in life was sufficient; whatever happened next could not diminish this sacrament of the present moment. "He had asked to be admitted to religious life, thinking he would be skinned alive for his awkwardness and imperfections, and thereby would offer God his life and its pleasures. But God had fooled him, for he experienced only satisfaction. This led him to tell God frequently: 'You have tricked me.' (Conversations section #3)

Brother Lawrence found in reliance on the grace of Jesus Christ the magic key that opened all doors. Truly the yoke of the Incarnate Lord was easy and his burden light. His major theme was the practice of the presence of God. To love was easy because he came to see the Divine Will shine through every moment and in all people. He recounted how he was not astonished on hearing every day about miseries and sins; on the contrary, he was surprised that there were not more, considering the evil of which the sinner is capable. He did pray for sinners, but knowing that God could set them straight when he wanted, he worried no more about it. (Conversation Section #6)

Resting on the omnipresence of the Divine, Brother Lawrence would not be burdened by the problem of suffering or moral failings in himself or others. Natural evils like sickness was a means of purification. The burdens inflicted on him by other people, voluntarily or involuntary, similarly brought him closer to God. He did not demand that such things be explained, only that they must not separate him from the love he had for God. Thus we can see a parallel between Epicureanism and enlightened faith. But what does Christianity add to the blessed way of the pagan path to make its own way preferable?

The difference can be summed as follows: The Christian sage, unlike the unchurched philosopher, recognizes the radical evil of man that reason alone cannot cure no matter how often it recites the fourfold cure. He celebrates the positive value of love, both in the form of Divine love and of neighbourly charity. Finally, he points to the real union of God and humanity that could not have been dreamt of by the philosophy of Epicurus, or any Greek, for that matter.

For most of the philosophers of Greece, Epicurean or not, there was no awareness of the mystery of iniquity. The gap between most human beings and the life of the sage was clear to all. But for them, all that was required was greater exertion of will. Like Baron Muchansen caught in the swamp, mankind could pull itself up by its own boot straps if it just had the right philosophical dogmas and exercises. In contrast, the constant refrain of Brother Lawrence was the incapacity of the human will. Sin marred us at the root. This did not make him full of gloom and grief. But he did face it, confront it, and overcome it with his own quiet discipline of mind and heart whose substance was not his own will but the free grace of God.



The Epicureans treasured friendship, so they were not immune to the beauties of affection. Epicurus went as far as to say: "Friendship, dances round the world, calling on us all to awake to blessedness; to the blessedness, that is, of the gods". But there was a sense in which the bonds of Philia did not lead to self sacrifice or self emptying. Mutual regard was possible and admirable between equals, not inferiors. The gods they took as their models were blessed in part because they were not moved by a compassion that would disturb their peace. An epicurean sage might risk death for a fellow enlightened one; death after all was nothing to him while the pleasure of a companion was one of the sweetest joys imaginable. But it fell outside the vision of the garden to imagine a good man suffering for the sake of those who were beneath him. For the Christian saint though (and Lawrence was that, regardless of whether he will ever be given an official title), life was a continuous self-giving to all people regardless of their merits. Christ had deigned to give Himself to a world that knew him not and reviled him to the point of nailing Him to a cross. Brother Lawrence chose to give his love to a lowly station that to all appearances was beneath the grandeur and liberty of his soul. But in both cases this loving condescension magnified the glory of the giver and gave a light where none otherwise would have been. Both the Christian God and His follower demonstrated a generosity of spirit that was in excess of any prudent justice. And in this liberality the world was raised up and the giver was not erased but magnified in a way that spread joy to all.

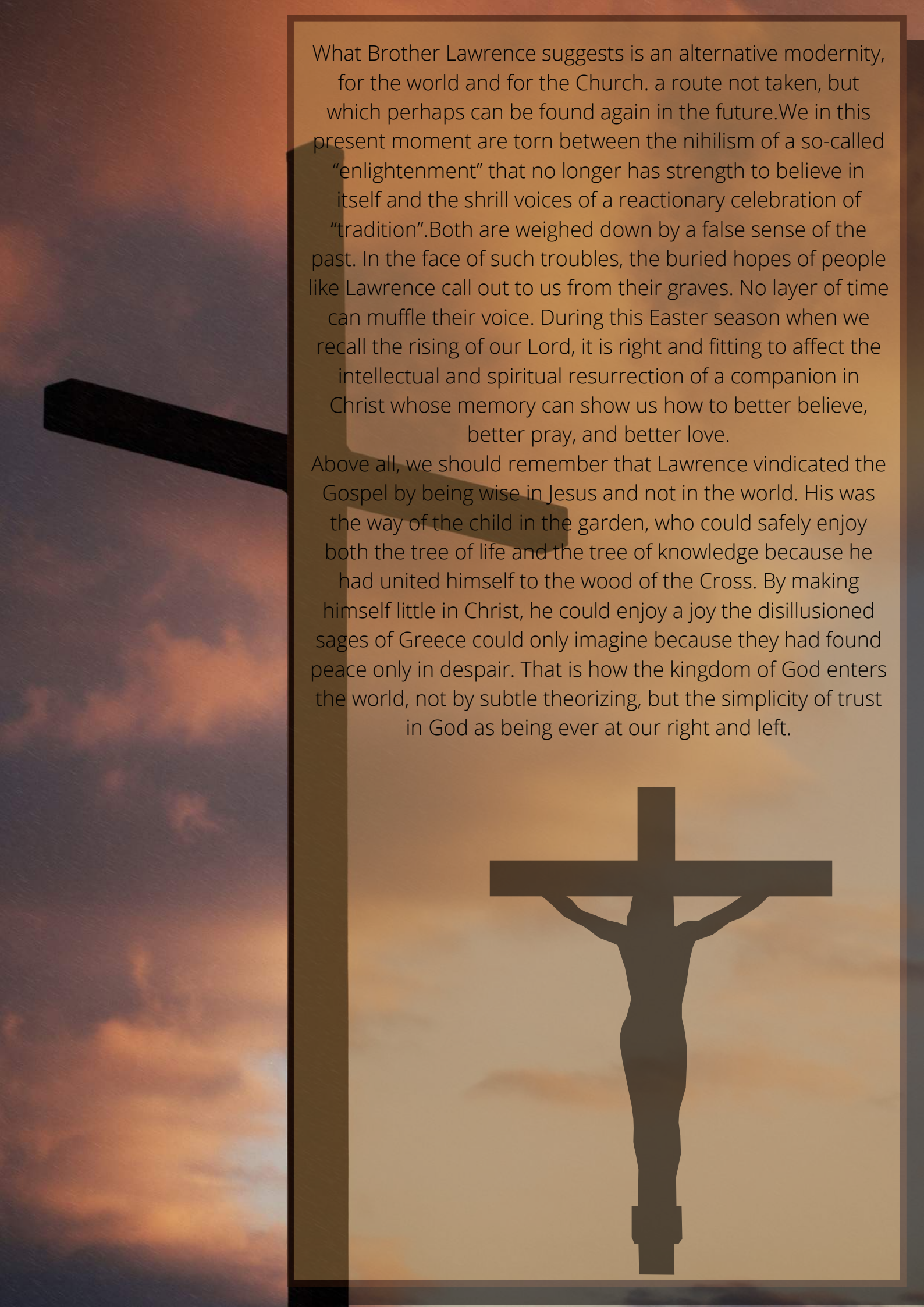
Finally, Brother Lawrence posited a way for a real union of God and humanity that no Epicurean, or any pagan philosopher for that matter, could hope for. The School of the Garden could say that the sage was an equal to Zeus himself. But there was a radical difference: The gods existed in their bliss by nature and knew nothing of our lot; and if we could elevate ourselves to their state, our divine models remained far away in their mysterious existence between the stars.

Far different was the case of the Good News of the New Testament. God, Himself, drank the cup of human finitude. And the sage himself could in turn, when his imitation of the Godhead became a reality, cross the barrier of the cosmos to paradise. To see the just man so raised was itself to see the face of the Father. The gap between the world had been bridged, and the God of gods had come down with a gentle smile, with a bloody hand outstretched to His bride.

In the life of Brother Lawrence, the perennial wisdom of the philosophic pagan schools and the message of the Gospel are brought together with shocking simplicity.

Ironically closer to Spinoza than the shallow cynical wit of Voltaire or the diabolical libertine mysticism of Diderot, he represents the possibility of an enlightenment that would not be opposed to religion. But it also suggests the possibility of a Christian and Catholic faith that echoes, in its own proper register, the notes of modern liberty.





What Brother Lawrence suggests is an alternative modernity, for the world and for the Church. a route not taken, but which perhaps can be found again in the future. We in this present moment are torn between the nihilism of a so-called “enlightenment” that no longer has strength to believe in itself and the shrill voices of a reactionary celebration of “tradition”. Both are weighed down by a false sense of the past. In the face of such troubles, the buried hopes of people like Lawrence call out to us from their graves. No layer of time can muffle their voice. During this Easter season when we recall the rising of our Lord, it is right and fitting to affect the intellectual and spiritual resurrection of a companion in Christ whose memory can show us how to better believe, better pray, and better love.

Above all, we should remember that Lawrence vindicated the Gospel by being wise in Jesus and not in the world. His was the way of the child in the garden, who could safely enjoy both the tree of life and the tree of knowledge because he had united himself to the wood of the Cross. By making himself little in Christ, he could enjoy a joy the disillusioned sages of Greece could only imagine because they had found peace only in despair. That is how the kingdom of God enters the world, not by subtle theorizing, but the simplicity of trust in God as being ever at our right and left.



The Traveling Troubadour's Spring Collage



Cows seen through
blooming flowers



Wee blue spring bird



Mother sheep with her lambs



Stream of spring water



*From the dearth of winter
emerges the bloom of flowers*



*Little bird walking
among the grass*



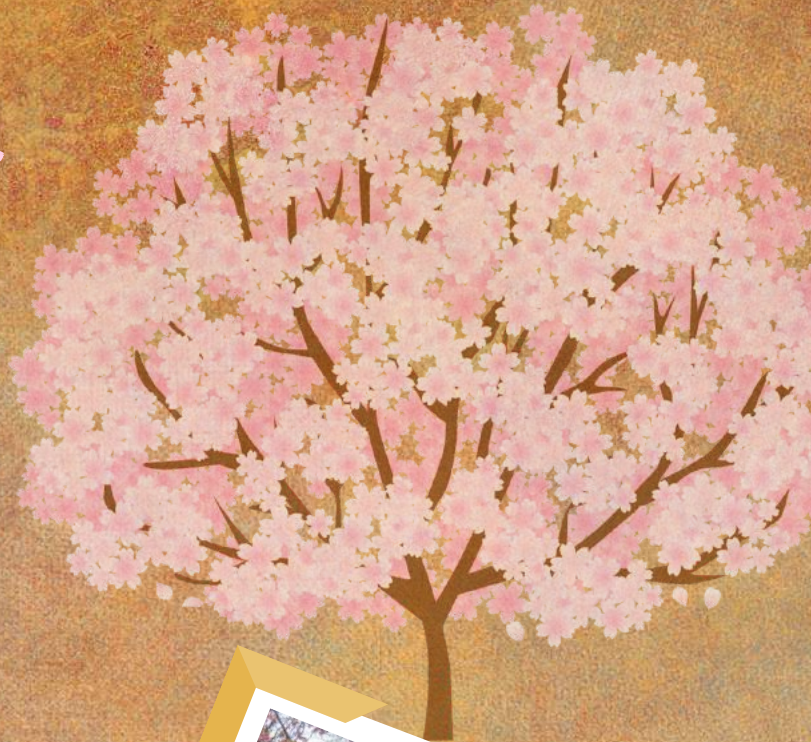
*Bed of flowers in the
foreground of a barn*



Spring blooms...



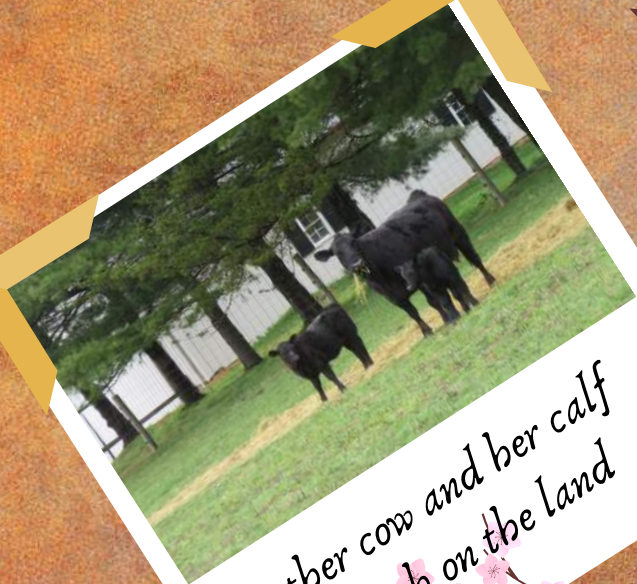
...make for a delightful sight



Young moth recently emerged
from its cocoon



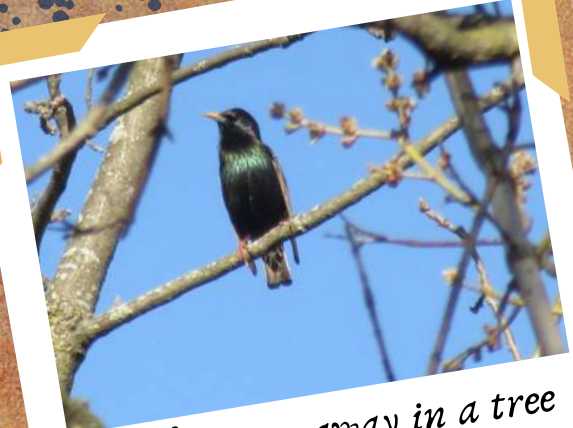
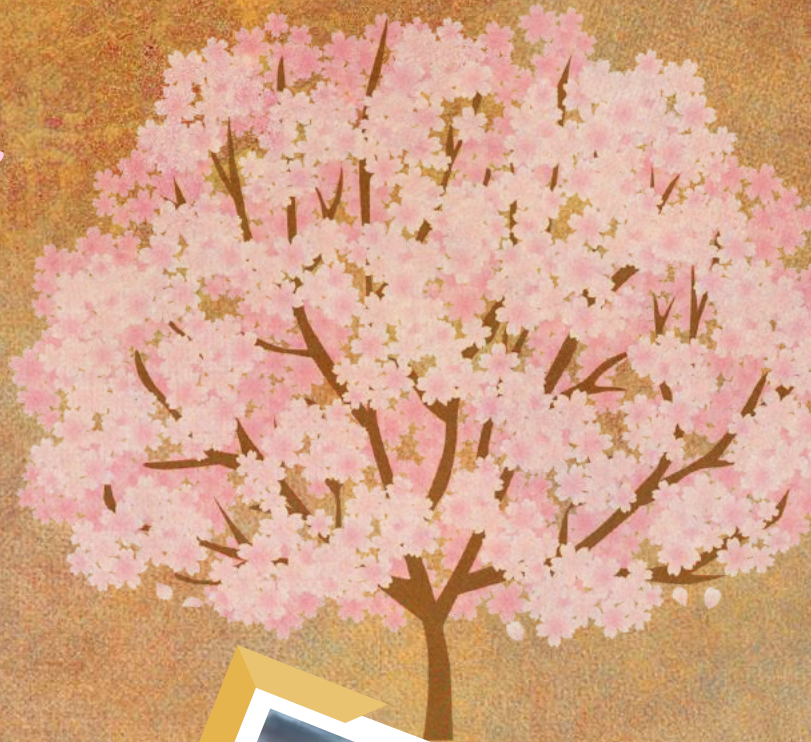
The Troubadour's house seen
though flowers a-bloomin'



Mother cow and her calf
grazing on the land



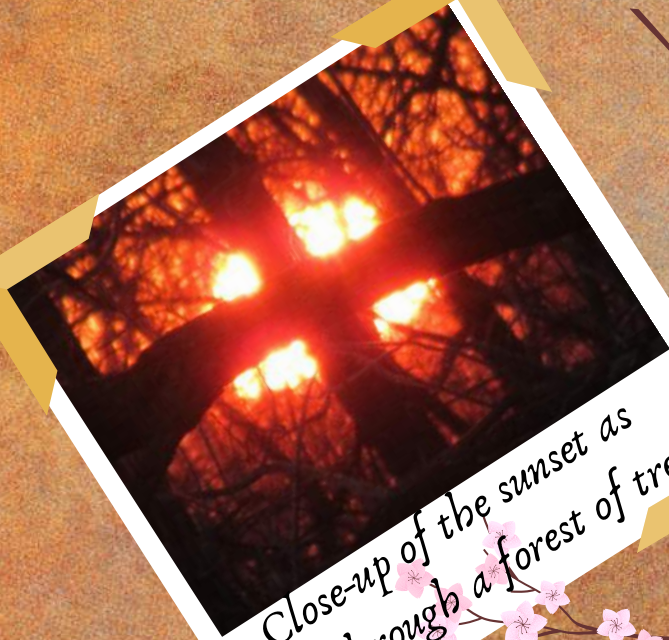
The budding beginnings
of a new season



*Bird chirping away in a tree
on a clear spring day*



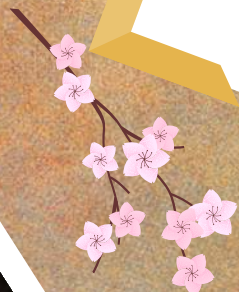
*A beautiful sunset
on the horizon*



*Close-up of the sunset as
seen through a forest of trees*



*The Troubadour standing before
a tree await its chance to bloom*



Easter Trivia

- Recalling some of the pagan traditions surrounding spring, children in Sweden celebrate Easter by dressing up as witches called “påskkärringar” (“Easter witches”) and going door-to-door asking for candy.
- Every Easter Sunday, the citizens of Vrontados, on the island of Chios in Greece, celebrate “Rouketopolemos” (“rocket war”). Teams from two ‘opposing’ churches fire rockets at the other church’s bell, with the winner being the one to ring the bell first. Some years have seen more than 100,000 rockets fired.
- The rabbit-eared bandicoot, also called the bilby, is a rare, desert-living marsupial in Australia. As a way of helping conservation efforts, Chocolate Easter Bilbies, much like Chocolate Easter Bunnies, are given as gifts at Easter.
- The New Zealand Broadcasting Act of 1989 prohibits all advertising on TV on Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, Good Friday and ANZAC Day. Violating the prohibition could see a fine of up to \$100,000.

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Broadcasting Act 1989 No 25 (as at 01 December 2020), Public Act 81 advertising hours – New Zealand Legislation. (1989). New Zealand Legislation. <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0025/latest/DLM158916.html>
Davey, S. (2016). *Around the world in 500 festivals*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
Zielinski, S. (2012, April 5). *Chocolate bilbies, not bunnies, for an Australian Easter*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/04/04/150005331/chocolate-bilbies-not-bunnies-for-an-australian-easter>

My British Literary

BY ELIZABETH ROPER
Spring

Early spring morning, crouched in the cold, wearing pyjamas and wellies, putting together an Easter garden with my son. My legs begin to ache as we line the oven cleaning tub with soil and horticultural grit. I try kneeling, but the frost has made the patio into a sheet of burning cold and so I resort to a garden kneeler which hasn't seen the light of day for four months. My son places small slabs of local limestone together to represent Christ's tomb, and they immediately collapse.

This morning is an okay early spring day; it's warmish in the sun, we are filled with the feel-good of a week of family playdates and I think the three of us and the cat feel like we are shaking off winter.

This year everything has been about home. Getting through a winter lockdown is of course an extra challenge, but of all the seasons it's in every winter that I find any sense of the spiritual beyond the high, bright sacred rites of December can tend to evade me. Life can feel a little vacuous and flat as we hole ourselves up with Netflix, and with evidence of the Truth represented by unopened Christmas presents. Dark Ages Christian monks, it is said, organised their embodied communion with God around the opportunities for connection and experience in either the 'Cave', at the 'Table' and on the 'Road'. Whilst I have had time to consume podcasts and books with a passion this winter, my personal cave is now a little crowded and I long for the table and fellowship with others, but more than that, the 'Road'. My relationship with God began and always longs for nature, and my instinct for Pilgrimage is calling me away from lockdown!

We plant little narcissi, lay some moss over the stones and erect a tiny cross made of garden canes into the Sacred Oven Cleaning tray. The way we say a school prayer and sit back to enjoy the birdsong.

In our household, we usually plan a few adventures to get into nature in Winter. We have variously done a quest to the summit of a Welsh mountain on New Years' Day; the dare of a January river paddle and a sledging trip when winter seems to have delivered all we will ever need in the virgin snow on the garden path. But the unending stuffiness and closeted comfort of food delivery, central heating and on-tap distraction on screens is ultimately something my soul, like many longs to get away from. It's not only the new shoots and new growth that Spring brings which we long for, but a chance to fling open the windows, lie on grass, not draw the curtains, and to return to vivid, nourishing reality. Identifying as I do with the Celtic church, the Bible is the First Book, and Nature is the second, therefore Spring is a sacred Feast of its own.

Some of my favourite writing about Spring comes from the abundance of nature writing from the Northern Hemisphere that has been published in the last decade and some from lusciously atmospheric fiction.

I think many of us feel a great empathy for what we read in perceptive nature writing. I recently read 'Wild Hares and Hummingbirds' by Stephen Moss, which was written a few years ago. He describes the kind of gathering crescendo as life returns to the village of Mark on the Somerset Levels in Somerset. The land is soggy, low and deep feeling; literally in a bowl surrounded by the M5 and islands of clay and Jurassic sandstone – most notably, Glastonbury Tor, Brent Knoll hill and the Island of Wedmore. I used to 'commute' to an outdoor job through Mark – a desperately needed and wanted job which I commuted along the way down the motorway to attend. Dropping down from the motorway slip road and into the village, past the rhines (roadside drainage channels), cider orchards and ancient winding pumps always made me feel like I had entered a certain special place in time and space. It always made me want to write.

Stephen Moss describes the village waking up from winter; “A hesitant dusk chorus fills the heart of the village with sound, punctuating the twilight silence of the past few months.” I am there with him as he describes the deep joy at finding his first unfurling snowdrop.

My favourite works of fiction are also those which describe so vividly the natural world around the characters, which somehow enables me to feel the emotions of the piece more deeply.

For me, no writing does this more so than Thomas Hardy’s descriptions of his Wessex – focussed on the modern-day counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, south Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Somerset. Having briefly worked at an historic site in Dorset I can say that there is nowhere quite like the white chalk hills of Cranborne Chase in Spring. Already the light there seems to reflect the chalk which peeks out as perfectly round hills give way to escarpments and when the snowdrops and wild daffodils come there is an imagined impression of hope and uplifting, spiralling light. Pegged down amongst the hills are ancient sites – burial mounds and earthworks. Hardy uses the region’s ancient past to underpin a sense that his characters are of the earth and of a nature which is wild and proudly human.

In my all time favourite, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Hardy describes spring with detached observation, as if welcoming a community of ‘players’ and biological inevitable growth as Tess, the hero, builds to her first real love affair. Instincts to mate and procreate run alongside the inevitable unfurling of spring, it would seem:

“The season developed and matured. Another instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches and such ephemeral creatures took up their positions where only a year ago others had stood in their place when they were nothing more than inorganic particles. Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifting up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked up scents in invisible jets and breathings.”

The nature writing of Rob Cowen has really drawn me in these past years. Rob spends his time consciously studying the life of the ‘Edgelands’ – the points at the edges of Harrogate, North Yorkshire where abandoned railway sidings and industrial structures are overgrown with unmanaged, wild nature. To me Rob captures the luminescence of the early spring by describing how the mystery of the old metal shapes, the pylons and the workers paths, frame the promise of the unfurling spring, lending a sense of the imminent to our imagination about what will pop up and out of the ground next and where this flat cold path will lead us in the lingering light of dusk.

It was said of Gilbert White; a country naturalist of the mid-18th C, as yet untouched by Romanticism and predating Darwin; “in spite of his modesty and extreme reticence, his spirit shines in every page; that the world will not willingly let this small book die....chiefly because it is a very delightful human document.” (Zoologist, Alfred Newton, cited: Anne Secord, *Oxford World’s Classics* edition) Newton is referring to his ‘*A Natural History of Selborne*’...an anthology of his letters describing in a mildly humorous and largely detached observational way, the flora and fauna of his East Hampshire estate. Newton recognises that Gilbert White’s observations capture a kind of ‘first contact’ with society and the diversity of nature. It is the human reaction to the species he studies which makes the writing so enduring. Of the curlews, Gilbert writes:

“*Oedicnemus* is a most apt and expressive name for them, since their legs seem swoln like those of a gouty man.”

Likewise, in ‘*Common Ground*’, it is Rob Cowen’s very human response that we enjoy as he describes the things of beauty and mystery at his ‘Edgelands’ in spring:

“While my back was turned, the blackthorn blossomed. Its flowers are heaped over at the meadow’s edges like snow, bright enough to burn your retinas. They are Tate & Lyle white, the white of wedding dresses and meringues, bleached against the contrast of their black, leafless branches. A crow is suspended for a second in the sky above, held as if on wires. From that height sloe flowers in rows must resemble chalk on a football pitch, parcelling up fields, splicing the meadows, woods, road verges and houses.”

By the end of Rob’s narrative, we are beyond angry alongside him that rights to work the land were robbed of people centuries ago with the Inclosures Acts and Highland Clearances, and that now we are reduced to

voyeuristically exploring the edges of things.

A life immersed in place, is how I would describe the writings of Katharine Swift, in her autobiographical 'The Morville Hours' and 'The Morville Year'. Morville being a hamlet in the utterly beautiful, often wild and lesser visited county of Shropshire. Morville is close to the Wenlock Edge, the 'blue' Shropshire Hills of A.E. Housman's poem and itself steeped in history which Katharine immerses herself in as she works to establish a garden to reflect its tapestry of lives across the centuries. On seeing her first bluebells of the season Katharine writes:

"it is a sight to take your breath away – literally, as when you wade out into cold sea water, and one wave, bigger than the others, suddenly catches you unaware smack in the midriff. It's the unexpectedness of them, glimpsed through distant trees. But there is something of cool blue water about the colour and movement of bluebells: the way they flow in little eddies and swirls, lapping at the trunks of trees; the way they collect in the hollows and overflow down the hillside, at first in little rivulets and then in whole cascades."

One of the most 'human', endearing and gentle stories I ever read was by another woman, moving to establish a fulfilling life in a 'wilder' landscape. 'A Ram in the Well' by June Know-Mawer is described as 'A Welsh Homecoming'. I have never developed more affection for a country in a book than through this one. The characters are friendly, and the sense of the local community is strong. Of Spring on her Welsh mountain, where she buys an old farm building and a ram, June describes a morning in her valley:

"The valley is a dream of beauty, veiled in a pale golden light, the air being soft with new scents – hawthorn, bluebells, primroses.... In the half-light the house is enfolded in the peculiar dense silence of the mountain. I like to think my mountain is a presiding spirit and consider myself lucky to live in its shadow." June Knox-Mwar

When I was in my twenties, long before I had a son to build Easter gardens with, I was working at an Iron Age village, and literally telling school children stories around the hearth. I began to read literature from Celtic and folkloric scholars. Probably the single most important passage I have read, digested and meditated on in relation to spring is Caitlin Matthews 'Song of Imbolc', about February 1st to May 1st every year:

"I am the unopened bud and the blossom,
I am the life-force gathering to a crest,
I am the still companion of the silence,
I am the far flung seeker of the quest,
I am the daughter gathering in wisdom,
I am the son whose questions never cease,
I am the dawn-light seeking out glad justice,
I am the centre where all souls find peace."

This, to me, embodies all of the potential of the season, and what it has meant to generations of people, and especially to the populations of tribes or Kingdoms in Celtic and Saxon Britain. The words very cleverly are not wholly Pagan or Christian, but suit my instinct, and my lived experience of finding the Christ consciousness in Nature. Or that is how I see it.

My imagination is easily captured with thoughts of life over the Atlantic in states which share our climate. I recently completely gobbled up Sebastian Barry's 'Days Without End'. It is a love story between two soldiers who begin life as penniless Irish immigrants, striking deals with native communities and the rough justice of the early settled towns. Epic journeys across glorious landscapes are celebrated as an antidote to their dangerous lives. Often, the monologue that is the unending first-person narrative, pauses to use such beautiful, sometimes raw and sometimes shocking descriptions of the states through which they travel, that I literally have to put the book down and take it in. On spring, Sebastian Barry's 'Thomas McNulty' describes a time of peace when the lovers got to stop and sow, lending a hand at a Tennessee farm:

“Snow goes and then we are ploughing like our lives depend on it which they do. Now the four mules are hitched and show their worth and plough forty acres back and forth three times. The land is lined for plants and then the little plants are brought into the fields and one spikes the earth with a peg and another plants a plant and another gives it water and feed. And Tennyson sings his African songs and we’re stooped in the trees for midday dinner. Lige oftentimes plays the fiddle so as the notes go into the woods to twitch the sleep of birds.”

An essential part of our home life, as the year turns, is to pick up the season’s Brambly Hedge book by Jill Barklem (that I purposely leave on the dresser) and enjoy its intricate pictures of mice living in tree stumps. My son and I followed the route of their staircases through the myriad rooms Jill Barklem illustrated – apparently while she sat on a train commuting in London. Now I know more of the countryside than I did when I was seven, I also appreciate the attention to detail depicting the British spring, in her ‘Spring Story’ book – a tale of a birthday picnic amongst the primroses and crabapple blossom. We sit side by side to investigate what the mice are cooking in their cavernous kitchens and wonder how long it takes them to eat a whole chestnut. We put our central heating on, as the April wind reminds us that winter is not long gone and sit to dream of the kind of sunny days that Mr Apple the mouse and friends appears to be having at Brambly Hedge – the most charming of children’s books that truly do so much to introduce us to nature. “For this good food from our green fields may we be very grateful,” says Mr Apple, “If you get [the knives] out, we can cut the pies!”



Cemetery Story

BY NAZIA IFTEKHAR

I enter the cemetery and follow the all too familiar winding paths. Overhead the jets taking off and landing at Hobby airport assault my ears with the roaring of their turbine engines. The anterior graves are shaded with beautiful live oaks. I'm headed to the back lot, to Garden number nine, Jannatul Naeem.

The munchkin is napping in his car seat. I pull all the windows down to let the breeze cool him. I grab the polyester peonies I had picked up at the Dollar tree and make my mini trek through the grave markers. Momentary panic when I can't find her.

You would think a mother's intuition would be enough to pave the way like an internal GPS system. I feel guilty that it is not so. The cemetery had grown so much since my last visit and there are no oak trees in this clearing to flag my path.

"Follow the markers," I remind myself after I run back to check on my boy and make sure the car is cool enough for him. This time, I walk past the trio of teen siblings shot down on that fateful day in their home. Different birth dates. same last names and date of death. I walk past the high school athlete who collapsed on the field due to an undetected cardiac anomaly, his grave marker decorated with a football.

I walk past the lady who was the mother of one our beloved friends who has the same name as my little one. The hardest ones to walk by are the babies.

Tiny circular grave markers, you see, as they don't take much space. Some pepper the odd sized spots at the periphery that flank the asphalt path. Others buried in shallow spaces around a relative. Filler gravestones like filler flowers. Baby's breath. I found her. I pause and exhale. Her flanks are empty, as I own the spot to her right. The only piece of land in Houston that I can claim as mine. It's been too long. Her nameplate is obscured with mud and weeds. The old synthetic flowers feel heavy with clay in my fingers. The bright colors have become sun-bleached and the petals have shrunk into unrecognizable



clumps. I replace them hastily so I can run back to the Rogue to check on her brother. The interiors are still cool due to the cross breeze. I unceremoniously dump the flowers to join the others in a nearby trash can overflowing with similar vestiges and from a corroded tap jutting from the dirt I fill a watering can to wash away the muck from her gravestone. I scrub off the embedded mud in the crevices with the only thing I have handy, baby wipes. I talk to her. I tell her to enjoy her time in jannah and to wait for me. The birdsong nearby soothes me. The tears will themselves down my face and I don't feel guilty. Well-meaning friends and relatives would remind me after her passing to show sabr without actually understanding how it manifests. As soon as a hint of discomfort would show on my face or I would start remembering, they would appeal to me to be strong and platitudes would spill out like sour fruit from a punctured grocery bag. When did holding in emotion become some sort of badge of piety and do we comfort our bereaved with the same level of empathy our beloved prophet (saw) emulated for us? I let those tears fall and I recognize them for the mercy for in fact that is how Rasulallah (saw) had described the tears that wet his blessed face as his infant son took his last breaths (1).

I wonder if I should invest in decorating her grave a bit more like a nearby plot planted with a blooming rosebush but then I rationalize I'd have to make the journey frequently to water it. It's funny how the mothering never stops. I remind myself that her provisions are now in the everlasting domain of paradise as it is for all children living or passed on and that despite all my wretchedness and shortcomings, I will see her again InshaAllah (2,3,4). I reflect on how things have changed so much since my Abida has come and gone. I feel a sense of calm that He is in control. I head back to her "little big brother" as he is far older now than his sister when she was living. He momentarily wakes and looks around the vast lawn with his inquisitive gaze. "Say salamalaikum big sister. Say Bye Bye Boo Boo!" "Bye Bye Boo Boo!" He sweetly repeats and dozes off again. I turn on the ignition and drive away.

References

1. Anas bin Malik (رضى الله عنه) narrated: We went with Allah's Messenger to the blacksmith Abu Sayf, and he was the husband of the wet-nurse of Ibrahim (the son of the Prophet). Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) took Ibrahim and kissed him and smelled him and later we entered Abu Sayf's house and at that time Ibrahim was in his last breaths, and the eyes of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) started shedding tears. 'Abdur-Rahman bin 'Awf (رضى الله عنه) said, "O Allah's Apostle, even you are weeping!" He said, "O Ibn 'Awf, this is mercy." Then he wept more and said, "The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord, O Ibrahim! Indeed we are grieved by your separation." (Sahih Bukhari)
2. Narrated by Khalid al-'Absi: "A son of mine died and I felt intense grief over his loss. I said, 'Abu Hurayra, have you heard anything from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, to cheer us regarding our dead?' He replied, 'I heard the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, 'Your children are roaming freely in the Garden'." (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad Al-Bukhari 145, Book 8, Number 145)
3. . Narrated by Samura bin Jundub (may Allah be pleased with them): "Allah's Apostle very often used to ask his companions, 'Did anyone of you see a dream?' So dreams would be narrated to him by those whom Allah wished to tell. One morning the Prophet said, 'Last night two persons came to me (in a dream) and woke me up and said to me, Proceed! I set out with them...' He mentioned things and places that he had seen, and then he said, 'We proceeded and we reached a garden of deep green dense vegetation, having all sorts of spring colours. In the midst of the garden there was a very tall man and I could hardly see his head because of his great height, and around him there were children in such a large number as I have never seen. I said to my companions, Who is this? They replied, Proceed! Proceed!...' Then among the things that the two companions (angels) said to him was: "The tall man whom you saw in the garden is Abraham and the children around him are those children who die with Al-Fitra (the Islamic Faith)." The narrator added: Some Muslims asked the Prophet, "O Allah's Apostle! What about the children of pagans?" The Prophet replied, "And also the children of pagans." (Sahih Bukhari 7047, Vol 9, Book 87, Number 171)
4. Abu Hassan reported: I said to Abu Huraira that my two children had died. Would you narrate to me anything from Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) a hadith which would soothe our hearts in our bereavements? He said: Yes. Small children are the fowls of Paradise. If one of them meets his father (or he said his parents) he would take hold of his cloth, or he said with his hand as I take hold of the hem of your cloth (with my hand). And he (the child) would not take off (his hand) from it until Allah causes his father to enter Paradise. This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Tamim with the same chain of transmitters. And he is reported to have said: Did you hear from Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) anything which may soothe our heart in our bereavements? He said: Yes. (Sahih Muslim 2635, Book 32, Hadith 6370)



LIFE *and* **DEATH**

Spring Flowers

by Hannah Semple

Blue skies,
Warm sun,
Flowers perk up
Now Winter is done.
Daffodil trumpets
Blow their horns,
Violet gems
Sweetly adorn,

Snowdrops nod
Their dainty heads,
Primroses peek
From mossy beds,
Crocuses cluster
Beneath budding trees
While hyacinths fragrance
Scent the breeze

Awe

by Katrina Harper

*Every day
More than once
My mouth drops open
Before I know what it's doing
Is this what makes everything new?*



Forest Essence

BY MICHAEL KULP

In the ancient forest, I breathe deeply.

And I fancy that the wild essence

Of the encircling verdant life

Flows into me, lodging in a soft

Pink fold and twirling its wild

Double helix forever with my own.

And the change to my nature

Gives no outward sign.

Though inside, perhaps something

Is incubating in the same imperceptible,

Relentless way that tree roots destroy mountains.

And it may take a hundred generations

Before it comes to the surface,

Manifesting a potent new kind of grace

Or strength or wisdom in some unborn

Child two millennia from today.

And he or she might be the first


Human to truly comprehend that

The best time to plant a forest

Is always a few thousand years ago

The Sap is Rising

BY KIM THOMPSETT



The sap is rising
Running untrammelled through the earth
Tickling my feet as it enters me
Coursing through me in little fluxes
I see my neighbour and want to reach out and touch
them
I see the sky and want to unfurl into its silky blueness
Every day is like a lifetime
While I am held rapt in the sheer gladness
Of growing

Darkest Before Dawn

BY AMANDA PIZZOLATTO



Life, death, rebirth. These themes are revisited every year when the flowers bloom again, filling the world with color, like a rainbow had walked through the melting snow. The image of a stone rolled away from the mouth of a cave circulates the web in honor of the Resurrection of the God-Made-Man. And it's not just in the memes that circle around the world, it's also in the tales that are such an important part of our libraries, and our imaginations. The first story that always comes to mind when thinking of the Resurrection is, without a doubt, the Chronicles of Narnia, and for good reason. The imagery of Aslan coming back to life is quite obviously similar to the Resurrection on many fronts, and no wonder, seeing as Lewis notes, rather obviously one might add, that the two are basically the same being. Narnia is a kind of "what if" story. What if Jesus went to another world? What would He look like? Using known symbols that represent Jesus, Lewis chose the regal lion as a form that He could use. As such, seeing a mighty lion willingly give himself up to death for a mere boy hits the Resurrection home in a new way, so to speak. Yes, God became Man so He could die for us, but seeing Him as a mighty lion, this mighty creature with fierce teeth and claws, allowing others to shave him and murder him, it kinda hits a little differently. With Christ, we see a man like us going through excruciating pain for us, we can relate on that level. But to see a mighty lion shows us the God side of things, in a way. We see a mighty being brought low for the sake of a boy, we really come to understand that God brought Himself down willingly to give us the chance of a lifetime, an eternity with Him.

In the Lord of the Rings, we kind of get three resurrections, that of Gandalf, Aragorn, and Frodo. Gandalf, like Christ, actually dies and is resurrected, brought back more powerful than before, taking on the role of the leader of the wizards, of those left in Middle-earth, that is. Aragorn goes through a more figurative death and resurrection, going through the halls of the dead and coming out on the other side, though the movie does give him a kind of resurrection. Frodo's death is him practically losing his mind to the Ring and getting it back, in a way, after the destruction of the Ring. Each represents a different kind of death and resurrection, but they do go through it as each is representative of aspects of Christ. Frodo's resurrection, his spring, is somewhat more tainted, in a way, than the other two as he is shown to be the most human of the three experiences, being the war-torn soldier coming home and seeing home a little differently. Hence maybe why his true resurrection lay beyond the sea. Plenty of characters have gone through a kind of resurrection, but what about a world? The Neverending Story undergoes just that as Bastian waits until the last moment to say the word to save the mythical land of Fantastica from being wiped from existence. There is a brief moment of darkness before Fantastica comes back in a blaze of glory. While this is less of an allegory or similarity to the Resurrection of Christ, it does bear resemblance to a kind of resurrection mentioned in the Bible, that of the Earth in Revelations, when all of creation will share in its Creator's glory. The earth is already going through its own miniature death and resurrection every year, in the seasons of Winter and Spring. And while there is beauty to be found in the white silence of winter, one cannot help but long for the color and liveliness of spring, just like we all ultimately long for the eternity that is Heaven and the new Earth, something we can only touch in the briefest moments of joy and wonder, in our dreams, and in our imaginations.



Within

BY ANA LISA DE JONG

Even Easter is too much.
God, some days I'm too spent for passion.
My soul sheer as glass
that any movement beyond still composure
will cause the whole to shatter.

So Easter, I cannot come to you,
remember you by entering in
to this long Saturday vigil,
the wringing of hands and handkerchiefs
that is the after taste of grief.

I must keep somehow alive,
as my small protected paradise,
or bubble of precious blown glass,
the foreknowledge of a Jesus risen,
to counter the one lying entombed.

Yes, sometimes Easter is too much,
with its Sunday coming but not here yet.
How we are promised rest and no more tears,
but are living each day still
in a story unfinished.

So instead, I ask for you to be the quiet sea lapping at my shoreline,
the tui's call that surprises in its proximity,
all those small ways you, resurrected one,
might love me,
in this house of glass
I am curled within.

Resurrection Power: An Easter Reflection

BY MEAGAN MCKINSTRY

The author reflects on the significance of the Resurrection and how it should serve as a foundation for trusting in Christ, even in times when much seems to be going wrong.

In many ways, the Easter holiday is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It is the day we celebrate Christ's triumph over the grave, over the horrific death Jesus suffered for our sake so that we could be freed from the bondage of sin. I daresay most practicing Christians hold the Resurrection closely to their hearts. The weight of that sacrifice and the love for humanity it demonstrates are so profound that it's almost overwhelming. For me, it is the basis of my devotion to Christ, the primary thing that has made me feel close to Jesus throughout my life. Consequently, when I was asked if I could contribute a reflection on Easter to this issue of Fellowship and Fairydust, my initial response was "Yeah, I think so!" Given the great spiritual significance that the Easter holiday holds for me, I figured it wouldn't be too hard for me to come up with something. Once I accepted the invitation, however, I started to feel a bit of doubt. After all, I'm far from a theological expert. What could I possibly have to offer?

It well may be that I haven't any novel ideas to supply; that anything I've written has already been said before, more eloquently and by someone with greater knowledge of Christian theology. But as I sorted through my internal unease, I came to the realization that maybe that's not the point. Perhaps my musings don't need to be groundbreaking in order to have value. Maybe, if I simply speak from the heart, my words will be exactly what someone needs to hear in a particular moment. I can't even count the number of times that the writings of others – especially faith-centered writings – have had that effect on me. Oftentimes, the author's statement has expressed an idea I've heard before. It was nothing new, nothing innovative - but a message meant to find me nonetheless; one that wasn't in the forefront of my mind until I saw the words written on the page. Therefore, I humbly present my reflections, in the hope that readers might benefit from them in whatever way God intends.

Perhaps it's odd that, to begin what is supposed to be a reflection on Easter, I've now spent two sizeable paragraphs talking not about said holiday, but about whether I ought to talk about Easter in the first place. However, there's a hidden significance behind that decision that ties directly into the major theme I want to highlight: the unlimited abilities of God. You see, my opening paragraphs originate from the impulse to prove myself 'qualified' to take up space within the pages of this issue – an impulse that comes from my own lack of belief in myself reflects a deficit in my faith in Christ.

I do want to be unmistakably clear that, when I speak of a deficit in my faith, that's what I believe about myself. I would never pass judgment on the faith of anyone else who regards themselves harshly; after all, it's a relentless world that we live in. I know firsthand how hard it is to keep one's eyes fixed on the positive, whether that positive be a higher power or an abstract sentiment. Nevertheless, solely when evaluating my own perspective, I view my failure to believe in myself as a failure to trust that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Fortunately, Easter serves as an annual reminder of this fundamental truth. Though I've never properly appreciated it before this moment, I now realize that Easter presents the perfect opportunity to not

only celebrate the foundation of my faith, but also to reinforce that faith. The Resurrection is not only a demonstration that God can perform the impossible, but an assurance that God is willing to go to such extremes for us. That's what I want readers to take away from this piece: the reminder that God's capabilities are endless, no matter how deep the hole in which we believe ourselves buried.

Like I've said, I know it's hard to remain hopeful. I can certainly tell you that I am a forgetful creature when it comes to the reality of Christ's mercy. Just as many of Christ's followers did not believe in the Resurrection until Jesus' identity or scars were explicitly revealed, I often forget the power of Christ when a reminder is not right in front of me. To cut myself a little slack, there are certainly many distractions to succumb to. I've been struggling lately against fear and loneliness that threaten to send me tumbling into a pit of despair, and I would venture to guess that many readers have faced similar conundrums.

As for me – in many ways, I can't complain. I am employed as an attorney, doing meaningful work. I have adequate access to food, water, and shelter. I am healthy and safe and recently received my first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination. Emotionally, however, I am experiencing some struggles. I've been enduring a fair amount of anxiety in connection with my work, to the point where I've felt somewhat desperate to find a cure for that anxiety. I am always worrying that I won't complete tasks in a sufficient amount or time, or that I will make a mistake that has catastrophic repercussions for a client. I worry about how the confrontational aspects of practicing law will make me feel, and how I will respond in those situations. I worry that if I "fail" in my career, I will not be worthy of love.

I'm still quite new to my job, so I recognize that some of this anxiety might ease as I grow more accustomed to the work. It's difficult to discern, however, whether that is in fact the case, or whether I am in the wrong career. Simply allowing time to run its course could supply the answer, but I fear that, in the meantime, I'll be left to live with the anxiety. And then, of course, what if things don't improve? What if I stick it out in this career, only to come to the conclusion that it's not for me? What will I do then? I genuinely do not know, and that makes me feel trapped. Afraid. Even desperate.

It doesn't help, either, that the isolation associated with the pandemic has really started to negatively affect me. I am craving normalcy; longing to have regular interaction with my friends again. I'm not sure if a social life would entirely mitigate the stresses of work, but surely it would provide more balance, as well as fundamentally satisfy my human need for connection with others. I make an effort to get outside as many days as possible, but even on beautiful days when the sun warms my face, I can't help but feel somewhat sad that I'm alone. I'm often surrounded by people in public areas, yes, but I have no interaction with any of them. It's still a form of solitude. While I consider myself an introvert, I have discovered over the past few weeks that human interaction is more important to my mental well-being than I ever realized. While more and more people are getting vaccinated, the virus remains a threat, and I take very seriously the responsibility to practice social distance to keep others safe. But that doesn't mean it isn't difficult to exist largely in isolation. I'm sure there are many of you reading this who have had similar experiences, or maybe even are struggling in similar ways at this very moment.

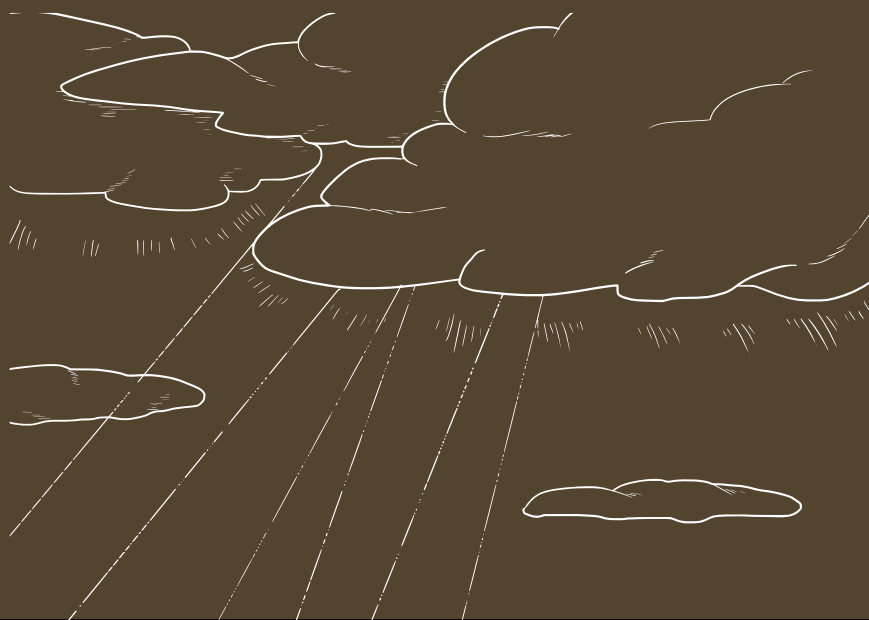
The problem with how I've handled this situation thus far is that I've predominantly been trying to get through it on my own, or rely on help from the humans in my life. As I sit typing these words, I know and understand that the aid my family and friends can offer me is made possible only through the grace of God. When I accept their help, though, I don't usually think about the role God played in providing me that support. I need to develop the habit of turning first to God when I am in distress, prior to attempting anything else. I have experienced before the comfort that prayer can bring, but for

some reason, that knowledge continually seems to slip from my grasp. I must commit myself to communicating with God on a regular basis – something I've never done a good job of. I'm not sure why it's so difficult for me to invest in a robust prayer life, but I'm hoping that my newfound appreciation for the power of the Resurrection will be the catalyst to make that change at last. The Resurrection, arguably the greatest miracle that Jesus has ever performed, demonstrates that Christ can do ANYTHING, even overcome the finality of death. If Jesus, one of the three con-substantial persons of God, rose from the dead, then surely there is nothing God cannot do! No matter what is happening in my life, no matter how much I'm struggling, God can get me through it. One of my biggest weaknesses of faith is that I so often forget this. All too often, I try to go it alone, and naturally, I feel overwhelmed. The Resurrection is a reminder that I should trust in God and lean on Him for support and guidance, because God is fully capable of bringing me comfort. Comforting me is nothing compared to rising from the dead!

This Easter, I am humbled by the realization that, every time I fail to call on God for help in times of distress, I demonstrate a lack of faith in the Resurrection and all that it represents. I may not be able to see what my life will look like in the future, or whether everything will be okay. But God's foresight is infinite. Where my imagination is limited or even blank, God sees endless possibilities. God knows my potential and my capabilities, far better than I ever will. I may not be able to envision that everything will be okay, but God can. And that's what I need to put my faith in.

In conclusion, when we find ourselves leaning toward doubt, we should rest in the confidence that God can and will provide – because we SHOULD feel confident. In fact, we should feel practically limitless, "for nothing will be impossible with God." We see this in the conception of Christ, we see this through the miracles Christ performed in His lifetime, and we see it most unmistakably in Christ's Resurrection. Whenever we feel like we aren't capable of handling whatever life throws at us, we must remember that we are not, nor are we ever, alone. We have an awesome God to depend on; to send us wisdom and comfort; to provide blessings to balance out the struggles. And every year, we have the Easter holiday to remind us that our Savior is limited by no one and nothing, not even death.

Alleluia! Christ is risen, indeed.



Ingredients

by Arain Niwl

THERE WAS ONCE A LITTLE GIRL WHO LOVED THE SUNSHINE. SHE WELCOMED EACH DAY THAT THE SUN SHINED AND RAN TO PLAY IN THE FIELDS.

ONE PARTICULAR FINE DAY, SHE WAS PLAYING IN THE FIELD IN THE WARM BRIGHT SUNSHINE BUT THEN CLOUDS FULL OF RAIN BEGAN TO ROLL IN. DARK AND THREATENING AND ACROSS THE FIELD SHE COULD SEE THE RAIN BEGINNING TO FALL.

SHE STAMPED HER FOOT AND CRIED OUT, "I HATE THE RAIN!" AS SHE SAID THAT A BEAUTIFUL VOICE CAME FROM BEHIND HER SAYING, "IT IS AN INGREDIENT."

THE GIRL TURNED AND BEHELD A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WHO SMILED AT HER.

THE GIRL SCRUNCHEd HER FACE AND SAID, "INGREDIENT?" "YES," THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN SAID, AND SHE INDICATED THE GIRL SHOULD TURN.

THERE ACROSS THE FIELD WAS NOW A RAINBOW THAT STRETCHED FULL FROM HORIZON TO HORIZON.

THE GIRL SQUEALED, FOR SHE LOVED RAINBOWS EVEN MORE, AND THIS ONE WAS PARTICULARLY BEAUTIFUL.

THE WOMAN KNELT BESIDE HER AND SAID, "YOU SEE IN ORDER TO HAVE A RAINBOW YOU NEED BOTH THE SUN AND THE RAIN. YOU NEED THE LIGHT AND THE DARK IN PROPER MEASURE." THE WOMAN HUGGED HER AND THEN VANISHED.

AFTERWARDS THE GIRL LOVED THE RAIN JUST AS MUCH AS THE SUNSHINE FOR SHE NOW KNEW THAT IN ORDER TO HAVE A RAINBOW YOU NEEDED THE INGREDIENTS OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN

Cross and Resurrection

by Christopher R. Altieri

To see things as they are is the great thing. We frequently flatter ourselves that we see through the stories we tell, reducing them to a sort of puerile or adolescent escapism, but there is one that grounds and fixes all the rest, more real than reality. The lines to follow, closely adapted from a podcast series I prepared a few years ago, spin out what I mean.

In Holy Week, the Church's official prayer grows ever more tense. The propers are terse, laden with foreboding. Her music wanes, tempos irregular. Harmonies wither as the hour of Passion approaches – and then, eruption of lament to break the heart and shatter the sky – then thunder and then a soul-slaying murmur on Good Friday – the cacophony of a death rattle – then silence and the darkness of the tomb. Sometime later, a solitary voice pierces the gloom. A light flickers, grows, and sends the splendor of its glory without end into the world replete with deathless joy.

The days of Holy Week mirror the Days of Creation. First, the riot of color and pomp that greets Our Lord as He enters the Holy City. The sounds and the colors and even the textures and olfactory delights follow. They grow, then quickly dim and fade, stripped of their complex vitality until there remains only the clatter of the crotalus – a death rattle – and then silence.

Stat Crux dum volvitur orbis, the maxim reads – and there it is. There He is, hanging from a gibbet. Good Friday.

In the Triduum, we hear the story again and again: Our Blessed Lord's self-gift prefigured -- perfectly accomplished – before His agony and the insult and injury and torture and murder. Then, His lifeless Body still warm and sticky with blood and grime and filth, hastily deposited.

“There is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness,” to hear the ancient homily attributed to Bishop Melito of Sardis tell it. “The whole earth keeps silent because the King is asleep.”

“The earth trembled and is still,” he says, “because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and Hell trembles with fear.” Holy Saturday.

I have mentioned elsewhere that my favorite moment of the Easter season is the first singing of the Regina Coeli at the end of the vigil:

Regina coeli, laetare! Alleluia! Quia, quem meruisti portare resurrexit, sicut dixit! Alleluia!

Ora pro nobis Deum! Alleluia!

That ancient Eastertide prayer of Marian devotion has a simplicity and a frankness that has always powerfully affected me: Why do Christ's faithful remind the Mother of God to rejoice?

I think it must be that we feel a peculiar solicitude for the Mother of God, whose Son suffered in His human nature and died for our sins. She is the New Eve, Mother of the Firstborn of the Dead. She remains the Mother of Sorrows.

His rising did not erase her grief, though she knew that He was to destroy death, but transformed it – turned into something not different but more like itself, indeed uncannily so, making it unrecognizable.

One may think of the Pevensie children, who, on a hunt in Lantern Waste, came upon the lamp post they had known when they were children and described it as “something out of a dream, or the dream of a dream.” Our Lord kept His wounds not for His sake, but for ours.

A moment ago, I was saying that Christ’s rising transformed Our Lady’s grief – turned it into something more like itself. The Gospel readings of Holy Week are rife with turnings of different kinds.

God turns defeat into victory. The angel turns away the stone guarding the sepulchre. The Roman authorities with the Chief Priests and the Scribes and Pharisees turn the story into something else. Mary Magdalene turns and turns and turns again, at the sight of the angel and of Our Lord.

We are offered an image of conversion, which is another word for turning, or a word for a kind of turning I have described elsewhere as:

[A] matter of emigration from ourselves, as we are, and a coming into something that will be like a received mode of speech, a discovery of ourselves as participants in a conversation that we did not start and cannot finish, a conversation regarding precisely the question of who we are and where we find ourselves.

This is at once *conversio* and *conversatio*, where this last is an outpouring of self into a community of sense. (The Soul of a Nation, 98)

Mary Magdalene’s turning may be a turning-in-place, but this turning is also of another kind. Listen to the Evangelist:

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.”

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

She thought it was the gardener and said to him, “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni,”

which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and then reported what he had told her. – Jn. 20:11-18

The verbs in the passage themselves tell a story: when it starts, Mary is staying – abiding, the Greek says – at the tomb; then, she sees something. At the messengers’ prompting, she stoops – almost “has a gander” – turns and then sees someone – Our Lord, it turns out, only she does not see Him – does not recognize Him – until an exchange with Him (she takes Him for the gardener – and is she wrong?). She turns again, and sees Him at last.

“Rabbouni,” she says, and He orders her to go bring word to the disciples, and she goes – the Greek says it with a word that means coming and going – and does as her Lord had commanded.

That second turning is most telling: I cannot take it as anything other than the turning of conversion.

I think of it as a pedestrian thing. I did a double-take when I saw our neighbor out for a walk – this was before Covid-19 and masking and social distance were the order of the day – I was in my own thoughts and wasn’t



expecting to see her – wasn't expecting to see anyone, if memory serves – so I did not notice her until she greeted me and by then I was past her. I had to turn around to return her salutation. I probably ought to have apologized for not recognizing her, but that ship has sailed.

Community of sense: It does make sense, after all: Resurrexit, sicut dixit. "He rose, just like He said he would." I've talked a good deal elsewhere and at length, about how Christianity transforms the order of society. It brings a new social reality and opens new possibilities for common life. One thing Christianity cannot do, however, is force anyone to see that the world is good.

Nevertheless, Christians testify to the goodness of the world. We do this by showing the goodness of the world, and we show that by living lives of sanctity in it. Just how we are supposed to do that is a subject for another time, and probably best left for someone else to tackle.

St. Paul tells us that the world is groaning in travail – in labor – which brings sharp pangs at ever shorter intervals broken by dull pain, anxiety, boredom, all of which press on competing desires: to meet new life, and to be done with it already.

The joy of Easter will give way to humdrum each year – perhaps it already has – and it will give way again and again, each year we spend this side of celestial Jerusalem.

The world is passing: Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Ecce Homo: A Reflection on the Manhood of Christ

BY SAMUEL BAKER



And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him and, plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. (Matt 27:28)

Pilate said to them, "Here is the man." (John 19:5)

This is a staggering painting. In real life, it measures twelve and a half feet by nine and a half feet. Remarkably, the scene is 'framed' from behind, a technique that places the viewer squarely within the canvas, inside the praetorium, as a complicit observer, just steps away from the centre stage. This significant reversal of perspective strews breath-taking light across the background of the painting, where the glare of the sun reflects off the colossal government building and picks out individual faces in the crowd as if they are, somehow, the protagonists.

Inside the cooler, darker chamber all but one of the characters' faces are turned away from the observer; their inner thoughts veiled and left to the imagination. Strangely, the one illuminated and centrally-sited character is not actually the focus of the painting; he appears transparent and disembodied, his clothing merging with the edifice in the background.

A number of directional techniques within the painting compel us to look around, perpetuating the impression that we are really present: the position of the chequered floor tiles tells us that we are not face-on to the enormous throng; our eyes are quickly drawn from them to a distant point at the end of the crowded thoroughfare. The pillars take our gaze both upwards and outwards to the groups in each annex of the chamber – the praetorian guard to the left, representing the military power of Rome, and perhaps a cluster of lawyers to the right, one with a legal scroll in his hand, representing its judiciary.

The glances of the peripheral characters cause us to wonder what has caught their attention and we follow their stares; the guards scan the rooftops for signs of trouble while the lawyer appears to give a last look over his shoulder before departing. Maybe he knows his case holds no water. Finally, the gesticulating hand, as the point of convergence for the whole painting, re-centres our attention and introduces us to the man whom all the fuss is about.

In contrast to everyone else – except, perhaps, the woman by the pillar – he remains still and composed. Standing by the soldiers, his stature, his naked torso and the scarlet military robe reflect something of their own temporal masculinity and power. Yet his hands are tied and his head is bowed; it's not clear whether his eyes are open. We know his story: he's on trial for crimes for which the authorities can find no evidence; he's been brutally flogged, humiliated and denounced, and the people are baying for his blood. But there is neither hopeless resignation in his bearing nor belligerence or resistance, simply acceptance and compliance.

Behold the man. Behold him. Hold-him-in-being. Hold him before you and ponder. Wonder at him. Amongst all the surrounding opulence, power and moral high ground, what possible examples of manhood are we to take from his meek acquiescence?

Everything we've been taught about what it means to be a successful man, about achieving status, authority and riches is turned on its head by this otherworldly defendant: "If my kingship were of this world", he says, "my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world".

Yet silhouetted against the bright, open sky, bearing the marks and crown of his mistreatment, his presence remains imposing.

Compare this to the governor in the centre of the scene, frantically occupying the crowds' attention. Despite asserting his supremacy, (Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?), does he appear manly and authoritative? On the contrary, other than a foot, the back of his head and a gnarled hand, his spectral body is dressed in a translucent robe robbing him of substance.

Look at the vacated space around him. Note how distance has been placed between him and his throne, which he has abdicated in favour of pleasing the crowd. You would have no power over me, says the quiet man, unless it had been given you from above. The governor wavers, isolated and afraid.

Note too, the same distance placed between him and the woman standing tragically behind the pillar; his wife, whose desperate plea he has just ignored: Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream. Her face, the only one wholly in view in the entire painting, carries the anguish of all abandoned and rejected women.

Two men – two models of manhood.

One, a classical representation of worldly supremacy though, in reality, a tyrant in the limelight, abandoning his duties as leader and husband and hanging on to his power in a moment of self-preservation by condemning an innocent man to death.

The other, a sacrificial lamb poised quietly in the wings, ready to fulfill a purpose in life that will literally bind him on a cross in duty to God and to the love of his spouse, above any temptations of worldly kingdoms or possessions.

Later, the epistolist will write, "Love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her". This silent man will give himself up, totally, freely, consciously, decisively and with unwavering resilience, right to the agonising end. He does not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, he does not open his mouth, wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

"For this I was born", are the few words he says, "and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice".

From our vantage point on the stage of the praetorium we hear the governor's question, "What is truth?".

We can be grateful to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for taking up the reply, and to Pope St John Paul II for bringing this reflection to a conclusion:

God is truth itself, the sovereign and first truth. This formula brings us close to what Jesus means when he speaks of the truth, when he says that his purpose in coming into the world was to 'bear witness to the truth'. Again and again in the world, truth and error, truth and untruth are almost inseparably mixed together. The truth in all its grandeur and purity does not appear. The world is 'true' to the extent that it reflects God: the creative logic, the eternal reason that brought it to birth. And it becomes more and more true the closer it draws to God. Man becomes true, he becomes himself, when he grows in God's likeness. Then he attains to his proper nature. God is the reality that gives being and intelligibility. 'Bearing witness to the truth' means giving priority to God and to his will over the interests of the world and its powers (Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth).

So I invite you today to look to Christ. When you wonder about the mystery of yourself, look to Christ who gives you the meaning of life. When you wonder what it means to be a mature person, look to Christ who is the fullness of humanity. And when you wonder about your role in the future of the world, look to Christ. Only in Christ will you fulfil your potential.

(John Paul II)

Maranatha Morning

BY JENNETH GRASER

Fire at first ignites from within,
with the voice of St. Catherine of Siena:
“Be who God meant you to be
and you will set the world on fire.”

The warmth develops in my chest
like a photograph in a tray slowly appears
under the red glow of a darkroom bulb;
then it is time for the sun to rise.

We capture the moments of expanding light
the way a tiny child chases butterflies,
intent on growing up to be a world changer.

We watch every adjusting movement of sky;
slow amber on the horizon
like the burning charcoal of
the final remains of last night's fire.

And then the darkness mixes
with stars and deep sleep,
before we awake to the approaching light
of long awaited Good News.

I've been searching for the fairy tale ending,
“And they lived happily ever after.”
When we actually need to return to
“Once upon a time...”

I will cease looking for the elusive
pot of gold at the end of someone else's rainbow.
When in fact the gold is rising now,
falling into my lap, circumnavigating my soul,
tingling the fan of my writing fingers,
turning photographs into memories.

Yes, the lantern of the sun
is floating across the fringes of morning,
carrying the prayers of all the world
above the widening brim of the ocean,
as the first light of Easter Sunday appears.

The face of the One
whispers over the smouldering embers
inside of me, breathing them back to flame
with a cool birdsong breath from the sea.

And telling me better stories
that start with, “In the beginning...”
and finish with “Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come!”

I do not have to wait for another day, another year,
another time for you to come,
because you arrive here and now,
into my life with the listening
deep, soft groaning, of the prayers
I pray into the great anticipation of you.

You take a picture of me, burning with your fire.
And I realise I am coming alive,
and you have come.
Yes, you have come to me.

The Lifespan of a Garden

By Raquel Fantoni



A spring birth comes with dangers for seedlings. Rain may fall with gentle nourishment or cold may come suddenly, like a bomb, with ash-frost scattered across the throats and young limbs of green seedlings coming up for their first air. When protected with a cover, they catch their breath and reach for the sky unabated. As with most precious things, shelter is needed to thrive.

The reckless heat of summer brings its own hazards as plants reach a gangly adolescence. Left unattended, tomato plants will con their way sideways: the weight of new growth pulled down to be soiled. With sturdy wire boundaries around them, their fruit ripens safely in clean air. As with most unruly things, support enables health.

When autumn comes around to interject with chill, flowers cave in and fruit is stitched away into pantries. Browned stalks are left exposed, prone to infection and wind. If pruned away, their roots are left unburdened to await the spring reincarnation. As with most beautiful things, there is a time to be unadorned.

With winter, comes quiet. Nothing is needed but solitude as the garden awaits the return of spring, for winter is an invention born of the world's need for slumber. As with all life, rest is key for future growth.

Credits

**COVER ART BY BYRNWIGA
INTERIOR GRAPHICS BY JO SEXTON AND HEIDI WILLIAMS
CONTENT PROOFED BY JO SEXTON AND WESLEY HUTCHINS**

Upcoming Issue - Saints and Sages

The next themed issue will cover Saints and Sages, including biblical figures, canonized saints and others of religious and spiritual significance from a variety of backgrounds, such as Saint Catherine of Sienna, Rumi, and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. If you would like your work to be considered for inclusion, then the submission deadline is 24th September.

We are looking for non-fiction, fan-fiction, original fiction, poetry, literary & media analysis, and artwork/photography. All concepts are welcome as long as each piece fits within the maximum of 3500 words and subscribes to our submission guidelines - which can be found on our website;

WWW.FELLOWSHIPANDFAIRYDUST.COM

All submissions sent to Fellowship and Fairydust will be considered for inclusion, but any which don't get selected for the special themed issues will still be published on the magazine's blog page, as usual.

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