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Poet-in-Residence**

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An End to Fear

This poem was inspired by Fr. Ed Kelaher's recent sermon on a passage from Isaiah (43:1-7) and the message of conquering fear because we're under God's protection.

Lord, we are beset by perils
in this life east of Eden;
You know it is a hard task to
live here without fear; it is primal.
Are there not shooters at the schools?
Are there not floodwaters at the doors?
Are there not bombers at the towers?
Are there not mudslides in the canyons?
Are there not fires in the forests?
We tremble in the darkness; do not
hooded thieves go about by night?
We find ourselves living clenched.
Our limbs fail us when we want to flee;
our hearts quiver and lose their courage.
You, Lord, know our fears; You know
we only fear when we are unarmed.
Arm us now, we pray, with the shield
of Your protective love. What harms
can prevail if Your shield goes before us?
Lord, please strengthen our limbs
so we can stand straight and firm.
Help us to live unclenched, and fill
our hearts so full of faith in You
that there is no room left for fear.

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Called and Empowered by God

***And there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
distributed and resting on each one of them. -Acts 2:3***

Lord, can it really be that I am part of Your divine plan? I am no flame-tongued apostle, touched by Your whooshing wind at Pentecost and able to talk to many peoples in their own tongues. I am no stalwart Moses, leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. No power-rod have I, that serpent changeling held firmly in Moses' grasp. And yet... Did not Moses himself protest and demur? Were not the apostles demoralized and fearful after Your death? But You equipped the apostles as You equipped reluctant Moses; thus empowered and invigorated, they bent their will to Yours.

When Your call comes, it also empowers.

Lord, I am no flame-tongued apostle, filling the ears of all earth dwellers with passionate praise of Your might. I am no prophet, eloquently instructing Your chosen people in the straight paths of Your commandments. But did not Jeremiah himself tremble and shrink before Your charge? The Lord strengthened Jeremiah and put His own words in the prophet's mouth, and Jeremiah delivered the judgment of God in a strong, clear voice.

When Your call comes, it also empowers.

Lord, can it really be that I am part of Your divine plan? Yes, for You knew me when I was in my mother's womb, and You marked me for Your own. Lord, You empowered the apostles as You did Moses and the prophets, and I know that You will also empower me to carry out Your call, wherever it may lead me.

Companions on the Journey

Lord, we thank you for the companions
You send to walk with us on our earthly
journey. Dear to us are they, treasures to be
cherished and valued. How we long to keep them.
But well do we know they are not ours to keep;
they belong to You. They are lent to us for a time,
to support us, cheer us, comfort us, share our joy,
give us courage, guide us, laugh and weep with us.

All souls belong to You; nothing is forever but
Your love. Please, Lord, help us to show those You
generously lend to us how deeply we care for them
while they are with us. That time may be long or short;
they have their own earthly journeys to travel.

When they must leave us, these cherished ones,
please give us strength to let them go, rejoicing
that they have completed their temporal journeys
and now rest in You. We will grieve, as we must;
we will miss that special glance, that squeeze of the hand,
that rippling laugh, that wise counsel. There will be
empty chairs at the dinner table, empty spaces in our lives.
There will be tears. Sometimes the ache of missing
our cherished ones will nearly disable us, and we
will long to have them back beside us.

But we will not grieve without hope. For we trust
that You are caring for those we loved better than
we could ever imagine. And we are certain
that we will be reunited with them one day
when we, too, have completed our time here, for
we have been lent to others just as our beloved
departed ones were lent to us. We will not grieve
without hope, for we know that one day we will be
with those we see no more, joining that vast family
of souls where each and every one is safely enfolded
in Your loving embrace.

Daniel, The Visioner

First I, dream sayer for a king, a captive in a foreign land, told the meaning to another, one sitting on a throne. But I took no credit. When I divined the bright image that came to Nebuchadnezzar in sleep, I told the king it was not I, Daniel, but only God in heaven who reveals secrets.

So the meaning of the king's great image with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass and feet of mixed clay and iron came straight from God on high. So also came the meaning of the smiting stone that turned into a mountain. I took no delight in the king's oblation, but I praised him when he called my God a god of gods and lord of kings. I thought to end this dream-saying.

But when I lay silent upon my bed, night visions came into my own head, and I was interpreter no longer but visioner. *Never would I have asked for this gift, if gift it was.* Greatly beloved, they called me. If beloved, why was I chosen to gaze on horrific scenes of earth's coming tribulations? For so these signs of strife seemed to be. I, Daniel, beheld the Lord's visions: four great beasts rising up from the sea snorting and bellowing, vast walls of waves rising in their wake. First came a huge winged lion; its mane lashed my face and its fetid breath sickened me. Second, a great bear devouring ribs in its yellowed incisors shook its shaggy head at me. Third came a four-headed, spotted leopard with wings on its back; the wings beat like drums. Fourth came an unholy ten-horned monster chomping with iron teeth, reaching out long brass claw-nails and stomping its feet on everything in its path. I, Daniel, saw the Ancient of Days robed in white, a stream of running fire, ten thousand and ten thousand souls and a great judgment book unfolding its pages.

One like the Son of man descended from heaven with outstretched arms to take dominion over all the earth. I, Daniel, was given to understand that the beasts were four kings and the fourth was the devourer of devourers, the destroyer, the unleasher of world chaos. Trees would not grow where he stomped, nor any birds sing. But I divined that after a time the mighty horned warfarer with teeth of iron would fall under the powers of the everlasting kingdom. *Never would I have asked for this gift, if gift it was.* For there was more, much more, and I feared to sleep.

Daniel, The Visioner (cont.)

The images jumbled and tumbled in my brain. In my unquiet rest I saw a ram and a he-goat clashing, and the goat broke the ram's horns with a mighty crack like thunder. There appeared to me one not from earth who could explain this dream: Gabriel, emissary from on high. I feared him and fell on my face before him. Gabriel told of kings of Media, Persia and Grecia, and long years of armies slaying armies, and bloody fields of dismembered bodies, death and desolation.

I, Daniel, was anguished in spirit, and I felt my head would explode with fever. My eyelids burned, and I could not eat; I took only water in sips. I fainted and was ill in body and spirit. I trembled and my limbs thrashed, and at dawn my bed sheets were drenched and twisted. I shared these visions with no one; I bore them for the Lord.

Never would I have asked for this gift, if gift it was. Toward the end of the visioning, I was given to see two men by a riverbank, one clothed in linen so white it blinded the eye. How long? How long? one asked him. It shall be for some time and more, he answered, but I understood him not. He seemed to seek my gaze; I longed to touch his garment and follow him. When the man in white linen left, my soul longed to have him back. I would have endured any visioning to see him again. Then I, Daniel, cried out: "O My Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And the Ancient of Days answered: "Go your way Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed until the end time." So I kept all these tribulations locked in my heart and bore them for the Lord.

And I waited...and waited...and waited...

Earth on Fire

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled." –Luke 12:49

Come, Holy Spirit, and cast your fire upon the earth. No fire of destruction is this; yours is a fire of love, brought, bought and paid for by the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Holy Spirit, kindle fire in our hearts to spread your love, even as a fire spreads quickly through timber in a dry wood.

Holy Spirit, let our burning hearts light our way to those who desperately need Christ's love, even as a fire lights up everything in its path.

Holy Spirit, give us tongues of flame to proclaim the greatness of our Savior, even as you sent tongues of flame to the disciples on Pentecost. Just as you freed their tongues to speak out to those who spoke other languages, so let us reach out to those who are different in appearance, culture and customs – spreading the Good News wherever we go.

Holy Spirit, just as a fire consumes all in its way, so let our burning hearts consume all that is not of you: fear, greed, oppression, anger, jealousy, exploitation, violence, hatred, manipulation, envy, guilt, resentment, impatience, revenge. One more thing is needed: take from us all tepidness that could reduce our burning hearts to impotent smoldering embers.

Holy Spirit, just as the disciples felt a rushing wind from heaven on Pentecost that filled them with your burning love, so let us be filled with the divine rush of your burning love today. Energize us, empower us, light us on fire, we earnestly pray.

Live in Me Today, Lord

As I awake, let Your name be on my lips.
Use me, direct me, lead me.
Live in me today, Lord.
Let my blood be Your blood,
animating my body with Your vigor.
Let my hands be Your hands,
doing the work that You want done.
Let my feet be Your feet,
taking me where You would have me go.
Live in me today, Lord.
Let my mind be Yours, ever focused
on Your Father's will.
Let my heart be Yours, ever beating
for the lonely, the poor, the lost, the sick,
the hurting, the weary, the hungry.
Live in me today, Lord.
When I am prone to forget whose I am
and go my own way, please remind me
that I may not stray; my self is not my own.
I am consecrated to Your service.
When I see one of Your homeless ones,
let me turn toward him, not away.
When an old woman with a cane needs
to cross the street, let me offer her an arm.
When I visit an ill, homebound person, let me
offer words that heal and draw him closer to You.
When I encounter an enemy who threatens me,
let me forgive him seventy times seven.
Live in me today, Lord.
And when I lie down to sleep tonight
in my bed, Lord, let Your name be on my lips
so You will live in me tomorrow.

Prayer to Valentine: Saint of Love

One day in the year we honor your name;
saint of love we call you.
good Saint Valentine, we implore you,
we do earnestly entreat you,
abide with us on all the other days as well.
Little of your life do we know, blessed saint,
except that you were a Roman priest who secretly
married lovers within the Christian Church against
an emperor's edict, that martyrdom for your faith
was your fate in 269 AD, and that we look to you as
patron saint of lovers everywhere. In medieval times
love notes were exchanged on your special day,
so it is said, and so we do today, honoring
your name. Blessed saint, of the dozen crimson roses
we buy in your name, not one will last the week.
Those decorative chocolates in heart-shaped boxes
will be gone even sooner. So will the display
of Valentine's Day cards on supermarket and
pharmacy shelves. But what counts
is what we feel for each other, deep inside.
What we need to give is ourselves, blessed saint,
not flowers and candy. Out of love, we need always
to offer a listening ear, an outstretched hand,
a welcoming smile, a kind word, a cup of tea.
Please help us to become more aware of those
among us who hurt, who feel isolated, who
yearn for warm human relationships
that reflect the love God has for each of us.
Saint of love for all, we honor you best
when we seek to keep alive in our hearts
your eternal message of love
on every day of every week
of every month of every year.

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Saints Who Walk in Blessedness

O blessed ones who walk
in the presence of the Lord;
hallowed ones who've known
His voice above the din
of surging wave and raging wind,
of marketplace and sword;
chosen ones who've seen
cherry trees flower in November frost,
a peace rose bloom in December snow.

*In blessedness walk softly,
in grace divinely flowing.*

O sacred ones who hear
in places distant and near
melodious sounds of His voice,
sounds of love divinely echoing;
blessed travelers who step
on the pathway of the Lord,
you have known grace divinely flowing,
and at the last angelic voices
singing you home with one accord.

*In blessedness walk softly,
in grace divinely flowing.*

O blessed ones who walk
in the presence of the Lord,
welcome us home we pray,
when our earthly voices cease
and our anchored steps are stilled,
we who labor on in faith and fear,
seeking the true path among so many.
Pray, let us walk with you in blessedness,
and in grace divinely flowing.

St. Patrick Voice of the Irish

By all rights, I should have had no love at all
for this heathen country. Its green-carpeted
hills, wind-thrashed headlands and stunted
huts never spoke to me of my homeland.
Was I not a son of Christian Britain?
Was I not seized by grizzled Irish raiders
with roughened hands and sold as a slave?
Did they not make me, their unwilling captive,
tend bleating sheep for six years? Though the
psalmist David was a shepherd, I liked it not.
For six years, all I wanted was my own country.
When I escaped and found a ship to take me home
to civilized Britain, I rejoiced. And yet...
I heard the voice of the Irish calling me back.
It was a sea-pull on my heart, strong as a tide,
and it dominated my dreams. It was God's call.
In simplicity, solitude and spiritual community
I learned to live with monks, training as a missionary.
I even set my hand to the illumination of sacred texts.
I had to convince the Church my call was real,
speaking from that sea-pull on my heart, saying
where I, an unworthy sinner, was most needed.
I heard the voice of the Irish calling me back.
Eventually my superiors believed my call and
sent me back to Ireland to tend souls, not sheep.
On every path, critics dogged me, like those
lean, mean-faced snapping Irish hounds. Druids
didn't want me there; they were my Pharisees.
But converts flocked to me to learn about Christ.
It wasn't I they wanted; they wanted the Messiah.
I heard the voice of the Irish calling me back.
What will they say of me in ages to come? I am
no scholar and no mystic, despite those tidal voices
I heard in my dreams. I am just one who, seeing a job
to do for the Lord, asked for His grace to do it.

Three in One

*One in three and three in one;
we celebrate this mystery.*

Love is an all-powerful Creator;
love is a vulnerable Infant;
love is a comforting Spirit
descending as a light from heaven
into the depths of profound darkness.

Our salvation is triune; our salvation
is one. Grasping this indivisible unity
is like trying to catch and hold the wind,
or like asking the sinking sun to
linger awhile longer before it slips
out of our sight. In Scripture has
this triune truth been revealed to us;
although it is beyond human understanding,
it is not beyond human belief.

*One in three and three in one;
we celebrate this mystery.*

Everlasting God, daily do You
give us glimmers of Your three-part
presence. What we cannot explain
with our heads, we take into our hearts.
What we cannot measure or quantify,
we humbly take on trust and faith.

One God are You, God of Abraham,
God of the Gospels, yet one in three:
holy, sacred, our source of strength
in sorrow, consolation in catastrophe,
joy in the blessings of Your good earth.

*One in three and three in one;
we celebrate this mystery.*

*We do not seek to understand;
we seek only to accept and worship.*