

BENEDICTION

*"God's breath in us returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage . . ."*
"Prayer" by George Herbert (1593-1633)

1.

Once upon a time, long ago there was a poet,
called George Herbert, whose words contained
healing potions for future ages, a childlike faith
fanning embers of hope, even on dark days,
igniting flames of love in his ministering to
the needy, the wounded, the vulnerable, as he
tried comforting the grieving, welcoming strangers
into his community, confronting self-righteous folks
since he felt the stories of Christ's life relevant:
"A crowd gathered to punish a woman accused of
adultery, Jesus intervened: *"Whoever is without sin,
let them cast the first stone."* One by one the crowd
turned away while he helped the woman to rise . . ."

2.

Facing doubt, discouragement, poor health,
Herbert sought the Spirit Dove Comforter,
promised by Christ, so pressed his heart
against the earth, feeling the pulse of Nature
rise and fall, rise and fall, listening to bells
across the countryside, a woman humming
to a child, a circle of elders in his church knitting
blankets for homeless families, furry creatures
rescued from harm, foxes finding havens in fallen
trees, a book falling open to a passage he
needed that day, tiny breast feathers of a robin
fluttering in the breeze, children laughing

in the field, a beam of sunlight on his bedspread,
twinkling stars within water-drops, a spider's
web shimmering with rainbows on the window,
a bird-of-paradise by the back door, his church
sanctuary: safety for all, forgiveness, reconciliation . . .

3.

As if miraculous: miles away, years ago memories
fly home to our hearts: we were whirling with Sufis
in a white tent at a festival in Freedom, California,
cheering each other on for hours up that zig-zag
trail to the ledge of Yosemite Falls overlooking
Merced valley, your words, when I asked how
you imagined an after-life, (Scripture scholar
you were) . . . opening your arms to forest,
mountains, river, plants people below: "*I believe
we merge with God in everything . . .*" so I dare
dovetail a symmetry between Herbert and you:
welcoming help in weakness, opening as flowers
after storms, glorious spectrum of colors,
smiling courageously in the face of dying . . .

4.

Similarly, my grandmother's example: living
in a small 3rd floor apartment without a phone
or doorbell, greeting her grandkids with hugs,
milk and graham crackers, no complaints, simply
gratitude, so I try creating a temple of memory
along the lines suggested by Mateo Ricci, places
for prayer, gratefulness, petitions, shrines with
photos as I savor the sight of you offering the *Kiss
of Peace* to someone who shouted publicly in
your face; I'm more cowardly, though try passing
on stories of ancestors for following generations,

flawed and all, bowing in benediction to the One

Herbert served, you too, in Thanksgiving as
it was in the beginning, now and ever after . . .

Amen Alleluia