A Wet, Expectant Morning

Robert Muhnickel
St. John Fisher College

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Cover Page Footnote
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Fr. Bruchner celebrates the early Mass, 
his floating words drifting to the street. 
Mrs. Grumen softly strokes the staple 
plucked half out of her worn Latin missal. 
The stillpoint: 
when Fr. Bruchner lifts the host, 
and passion washes out of him 
like dried and dusty alluvium. 
Mr. Burton clips the hedge, 
rakes into oval-shaped piles 
the thorny branches; 
Fr. Bruchner, summer-sullen, strides 
toward the altar, greets 
the congregation of scattered afternoon Mass. 
Mr. Burton approaches the altar rail, 
his gray sweater limed and dusted; 
trembling, he takes the host in his hand. 
Vigil is over. 
From Friday to Sunday, 
dressed in black, we have 
veiled our saints with purple, 
believed by the tapered candles. 
Still, we wait and watch 
the stars like dancing daughters 
of the holy morning 
waiting to be watched. 
He stands before his CCD class. 
Usually they are bored; today they 
ask him to reveal the face of God. 
"Abba," he cries, "Father!" 
Repeating that name 
through silent nights, he reaches 
past names, to find in the grappling 
that God is a kind of nothing after all. 

On retreat at the abbey, 
Fr. Bruchner sits at the window, 
watching the rain force up a mist 
over the summer’s withered garden. 
After compline, 
monks walk in rows, chanting, 
entering the crypt, 
dark womb of the Mother. 
Fr. Bruchner, losing his place 
in the psalter, remembering 
a woman he once consoled 
and his promise of prayer 
for her miscarried child, 
follows. 
Fr. Bruchner celebrates Mass alone: 
the chancel bone-white, and bare 
of congregation, altar-boy, 
or lector. 
Glorious Easter: 
a wet, expectant morning; 
the faithful prosper, drinking 
from the thirstings and fastings of Lent. 
A woman has received last rites, 
confession swallowed in gasping breath, 
communion dissolved in gulps of water. 
Fr. Bruchner kneels beside her, 
lifts the hair from her forehead, 
hears tears that whisper down 
the runnels her face has worn. 
The Mass at dawn is always alone, 
Fr. Bruchner slowly grasps transcendence, 
preening the kyrie, 
clasping the offertory, 
and starved for the Absolute, 
he bolts the devouring Host.

A novice at Becket Hall, Robert Muhlnickel 
plans to attend St. Bernard’s Seminary and 
to continue to write poetry. 
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