A Wet, Expectant Morning

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A Wet, Expectant Morning
By Robert Muhlnickel

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 still point: 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-shapes 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 thirtings 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.