

First Monday in Lent

Our neighbor's pendant goes off
in the dark: a call for help; someone
chokes, reaches for a lifeline,
a buoy. We get a call
from the first responders;
it is difficult for her to speak.

She is hard to hear. Her age is
a mystery. She likes it that way.
Over ninety? Hard to say.
Won't say. Vanity still wears
high heels and whispers.

A lot of anniversary talk
about the Titanic survivors.
I remember the Royal Lifeboat
lost off Mousehole, eighties;
all hands drown in Cornwall.

I pray a rosary
on arthritic fingers;
no beads, no human chain
to hold on to.

At first light, I read lines
from Sweden by a poet
who suffers a stroke.
He struggles, can't speak.
So, he wrote.
We want to hear
what is left of him,
and her.

Good & Bad Tastes

Since Adam's bite of the apple
our ancestors' sin was bred
in our tongues. What is good taste? Pork
roasted for rooting truffles, with wine
from the Rhine, or pork-fried rice?
Sins of the flesh may mean good tastes

have led to gluttony, too many tastes.
Doctors will stay away if we eat apples
every day, they say. Beans and rice
is a popular dish, with Cuban bread
and *platanos* from Puerto Rico. Rice wine
complements sushi, white wine pork.

Cochinillo asado, roast pork,
by Botin's in Madrid, tastes
of garlic. Popa loved it with Spanish wine
after bull fights. Spaniards make apple
cider along the Pilgrim's Way, break bread
and pour wine to wash down yellow rice--

big bowls of *paella*--seafood and rice.
Never far from the fruit of Eden, pork
goes through hell in an oven like bread,
to bake in sacrifice for forbidden tastes;
the piglet dies for our sins--with an apple
in its mouth, basted with fruit of the vine.

The ancient Greeks sailed everywhere on wine-
dark seas in the Odyssey. Rice
paper saved the artists' brush strokes; apples
no one eats pose for Cezanne with pork--
Jamon Serrano in still life. Our taste
for art is in the eye of the hungry; bread

alone will not let us live, but bread
and fishes multiplied, when blessed with wine,
fed the Last Supper The *Word made flesh*; taste
the body, drink the blood. Rice-
white, the communion wafer prays for pork-
devils running off a cliff, redeeming the apple
bred from good seed, good to the core, like rice
at weddings showered, sacramental wine--not pork
religions forbid, nor taste of forbidden fruit: apple.

The Seagull

wears the colors of smoke;
perches atop a chimney pipe,
precedes the talking smoke
signal to the faithful in Rome
and around the world.
Smoke flows dirty grey, then white,
like the dying seagull in Chekov's play.

Even death reveals earthy beauty.
Life is not just a play about Hamlet.
Not all birds at the Vatican are doves,
nor Paraclete. This one is wave-wise,
a noisy beggar after crumbs,
a scavenger, a hopeful sign
to sailors lost at sea.

A seagull in smoke suggests a Pontiff
who reads Borges and Dostoevsky
in Buenos Aires, a Jesuit with
a wooden cross on a cassock
white as Sistine Chapel smoke,
riding a city bus to wash
the feet of prisoners poor
like a Franciscan friar.

The Burning Bush On 4 July

We are drivers on speed, on a planet of fireworks.
Eventually our starship will sink in the black hole
of burnt-out stars, a volcano in the ring of fire.
We are warned by a Biblical passage

featuring a burning bush. I can see it--
here on the high ground half way between
Charleston & Atlanta, near the River Westobou.
On the 4th of July, the sycamore tree appears

like a burning bush. Leaves ready to leave,
like Autumn on fire in Vermont, yellow on the fly,
flamed, dry heat, like the Sinai. Be still. Keep moving.

This is no game of Clue--with a secret passage
from the library in the mansion to the garden;
more like the attic-closet-fruit cellar hide-out,
a way out--leading to the river, a rest-stop with quilts
on the Underground Railroad. Tubman with her pistol.
Follow the visions in Jacob Lawrence's paintings:

Harriet And The Promised Land (no. 17)--wagon rolls,
"The Last Journey." Maybe they will make Chicago.
Migration. Some of us will not make it through the day.
U. S. Marines are bleeding Red, White & Blue
for Pashtuns & Baluchs. The Taliban hide in poppies.

Some of us hide behind sand bag walls,
sleepless in mud huts, in starlight, listening
to rock slides; feel tremors; mountains grow.
The Anasazi staked out the Chaco Meridian;

they tracked shadows and sun,
did not live in their roomy maze; they entered doors
in mud walls for ceremonies. They knew they were passing
through on a longitude; light shadows moon phases.

Divine Mercy Sunday

Hope is renewal in a forsythia bush.
Two fishermen on a river pier
see a renovated mill's chimney,
Sacred Heart church spire. Gospel on Thomas.

See and believe. Remember Didymus
doubting disciple. April is cloudy;
all seers are not believers.
Fishermen take bass and bream from waters,
touch their catch, to lose doubt, like Thomas.
Syrians migrate, flee, seek mercy.
Thieves plunder archaeology
on the road to Damascus.

John was banished to the isle of Patmos.
His *Revelation* is description--war--not consolation.