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Homily

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Homily

I went to church today.
Not to pray to a Sunday God
who watches benignly
from his rock-crystal heavens
and meteor-bound spaces
this cozy tradition of
congregational catharsis:
untouched, unmoved
a brusque blessing
of frightened souls.

Nor did I think to praise Him
in lieu of the questions
that lingered for answers in my mind
and also in their minds
those whom I sat with on
all sides of me
waiting. Those familiar
ice-cream-days faces
whose pains were
once ago so remote, an
unsampled taste
sure to be memorably bad.
We waited, so long, to remember
each other, and Denise
who isn't here.

Did we miss something, Richard?
Why did we wait so long
for this meeting when it was so good
(oh, so good) in those staircase days
like kids without aunts
when we sat and talked and loved
life. Together we loved life
and Joann and Karrie. We loved
Tom, and John, Steve,
and Denise
who isn't here.

continued

I went to church today
Despite the fact that our crying God
had brought us all these questions
but none of the answers for Denise
who isn't here.

Because she was dead, and perhaps
even with Jesus, as they said, but
who could know
would know
in those October days when
two million leaves rattled
a colorful death in place of the
hope we all had before

In our Calvinist days of
sweet communion in rooms
filled with a fragrant feast
of haphazard people secure
in each other's acceptance.
In those ice-cream days, those
staircase days
when Denise was here
and isn't.

Because she wanted to be dead
not like us who keep breathing
seemingly, because we still want to.
And life functions quite according to plan
on an unstated knowledge that
we deserve everything
including our sanity
which we found out later
much to our surprise
not everyone had.

continued

Two white candles diminishing
pale brick with which they
enclosed this space to call it
a church
where today we are brought
face forward to our mortality
in polite conversation with a
blue-paper God who likes
gospel music. Time transfixed
upon an altar, as the world
in its passing
pressed tears hard on us
and we are driven to reflect on
dull bronze and a prospect where no one
is blamed, but all are at fault.

And who, in this whispered journey
around a child's room, asleep
may speak a fiercer answer.
Cry in the stone faces
of God's own image
a word.
That we, beyond doubt, have
waited too long, to come
together at last
for no reason but knowing
why is life
if all we do is die
worth more now than before.

Robert Scholten