

In the Parish Hall, a Toast

—For Teresa on the anniversary of her ordination and tenth year with us

Picture this: a trivia night
years ago in this hall, circa
twenty-o-five. Someone calls out
across the room, *Hey, Mother Teresa—*
big laugh all around, some friend
having you on. But the jokes stopped
as your gravitas grew. What's in a name?

I've heard you claim your name is spelled
the right way, without the hateful Germanic
aitch that creeps into many English renderings.
I've stood in her church in Avila, a city she shares
with John of the Cross, and thought of you invoking
the memory of a saint: "Christ has no body but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth but yours"—What's in a name?

You bet your young life on an old church
in your home town. Ordained here, commissioned here,
you merged your identity with a small band (about twelve
at first, if truth be told) of accidental disciples—
in a place of no certain future, no real promise of reward
for the great effort of your life, before your babies came.
Now you risk the flourishing of your family in the God game,
more precisely in the God With Us game, a thing that sometimes
yields cathedrals, sometimes martyrdom, but sometimes too a drab
and cloying cyphering of the mundane.

You would have none of that. Whether with energy of your
person, or some greater, channeled energy, you breathed life
into the small smoldering of grace amongst us accidental
disciples, and it took fire—not yet the tongues of flame
or prophecy the gospel sings about, but a steadier burn,
a heat to nourish growing generations; and they came
and warmed themselves and stayed. What's in a name?

Mother Teresa will never work. Better Teresa of our time, yourself
not of Avila, or Calcutta, but of here, a place of smaller history,
uninflated by the gas of politics and media, feeding, if not millions,
hundreds, not a few of whom turn the corner at Mokabe's on Ash Wednesday—
you who for ten good years have served us here with bread and wine,
with wise counsel and with measured but significant toil,
day labor that shelters us beneath God's hovering.

Julian Long
St. Louis, Missouri
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