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One Authorized to Perform the Sacred Rites

Like gold brocade on a priestly garment, ritual renders the everyday festive.

I might still be Catholic if they let women be priests. I might still be Catholic if they let *me* be a priest.

My Granny Marie was one of six kids, two thirds of whom took religious orders. Her sister Elizabeth became a Sister, and all but one of her brothers went into the priesthood: Father Fran, Father Henry, and Bishop Alfredo. Faith of a kind most people never witness in person, let alone know in their souls.

My childhood parish, St. Scholastica, was named for the patroness of book fairs. But altar girls were not welcome there until I was too old. A sign on the tree house: NO GIRLS ALLOWED.

Some posit *priest* comes from the Latin *praepositus*, person placed in charge. The language of the conquerors becomes “the” language.

Who wouldn’t want the opportunities for advancement? To don the vestments? To grant the sacraments, especially penance?

Being a nun seems like zero fun.

I am not trying to be offensive.

Examination of Conscience: not the best quality, but I’m pretty all-or-nothing.

There is no system that a clever person with bad intentions can't abuse.

No finer line between beauty and kitsch than you find in Catholicism. To wit: the pale pink crucifix that hung above my girlhood bed, which used to belong to my mom, affixed with the glow-in-the-dark body of Jesus.

The feminine noun *priestess* wasn't coined until the 17th century to refer to female presiders over the religions of antiquity. Even then, many of them had to perform sacred prostitution.

Outside now in the gray daylight, life and death do-si-do as usual. Faith makes the facts less maddeningly casual.

A little less agog, a little more ecstatic. Less "Oh My God" and more "O My God!"

Prester John was a legendary medieval king and priest, said to rule over the Far East when the Christian West was militarily threatened and culturally backwards. Who doesn't dream of a mythical deliverer?

We should be searching for a priest who can perform an exorcism on America.

Priest's-crown is another name for dandelion. *Priest hole* sounds dirty, but only means a secret room or place of concealment for a priest (as in an English house during the Reformation).

Who doesn't want this grim slog to be going somewhere?

During the Enlightenment, *priestcraft* took on the pejorative sense of "arts and devices of ambitious priests for attaining and holding temporal power and social control."

Growing up, there was always a priest around when we needed one.

When my parents bought a new car, Fran or Henry would bless it with holy water. A birthday? Holy water. Saying goodbye after dinner? Holy water.

Forget calling my Senator; I would like to dictate policy requests directly to God.

The legend of Pope Joan: a learnèd woman who disguised herself as a man and ascended the papal throne, eventually exposed by giving birth during a procession. I got in trouble for even talking about it.

In Sunday School, aka CCD, we gazed at religious paintings. One-point perspective makes faraway objects recede.

How long before we walk through the pearly gates of peace? No more Satan's spawn spouting nonsense on TV. A heavenly jukebox ready to play everybody's favorite song.

My faith remains gone. And yet my ears strain. A longing to hear someone in the beyond explaining: *Follow the sound of my voice. Rejoice when you get to the end of this hallway.*

A Source of Inspiration, a Guiding Genius

A male muse walks into a bar. Punches the time clock. Strikes a pose.

Seriously, though. Is there a term for male muses? A search of the internet reveals: no.

The original nine were inspirational goddesses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, aka Memory.

Some words are to be preferred not as nouns but as verbs: “The writer’s beloved wife was his muse” versus “I could sell the house, she mused, but then where would I go?”

Nobody asked me to do this. I just wanted to.

It takes a lot longer than five seconds to muse.

Beauty can help but isn’t required. Golden everlasting and parasol pines. A dusty trail. A fine view of the sea. Some bees.

When I think “thought,” do I mean the content of the thought? Either way, I don’t think “inspiration” arrives from “outside.”

According to philologists Diez and Skeat, “to muse” derives from “to stand with one’s nose in the air.”

The myth of the tortured artist—it shimmers with glamour. But why would you care to be known as vain and unreliable?

Caravaggio once drew his sword on a waiter who served him artichokes in butter instead of oil. Like, who does that?

Plato, probably, is the one to blame, with his idea of divine madness—a visit from above that lets an artist create. If the local plumber acts up he's just being a dumbass, whereas when an artist does the dumbassery, it gets glorified as his essence.

Shelley, Byron, Poe—what a pack of assholes. (Keeping the list short here for the sake of time.)

Yeats wrote, “The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work / And if it take the second must refuse / A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.” *I call bullshit.*

Killing old lies is like trying to whack mosquitoes with a tennis racket.

Knowing all the muses comes in handy doing crosswords.

I'll admit to craving an external catalyzer sometimes. Something to yank the me out of me.

As a teacher, I believe that the best is already in everyone, and my job is mostly to draw it out.

I did this because I wanted to, not because I had to. Not because anyone made me. That's different than saying that nobody helped.