

THE SALVADORAN MARTYRS

Standing in my driveway
a block from the church,
I cannot see the martyrs.
Publicity-shy, wary
of strangers, the saints
are cloistered in a corner.
Though I see La Virgen
and Juan Diego
on the wall facing west,
I cannot make out
the martyrs. From where
I stand, the mourning
villagers are angelitos
hidden in clouds
south of La Señora.

I cannot see them,
but I know the martyrs
are allí en el mural
at 1531 Guadalupe Street.
I know the alb, the chasuble,
the skullcap. I know Romero's
Bible, open but wordless,
a red cross gashed into each
facing page. I picture
his horn-rimmed glasses,
his salt-and-pepper hair.
I conjure the woman
weeping over his body.

The dead have dissolved
into the ether, but I am
sure the mural is there.
I know the infant
in its mother's arms,
the sign that reads
"El Pueblo Unido."
I know the iron shovel,

the bodies of four
churchwomen thrown,
limbs akimbo,
into a grave.

In my daydream,
or is it a flashback,
every detail is clear
as if I could step
through the mirror
into the mêlée,
though helpless to save
clashing knights,
toppled bishops,
pawns.

The mural is no phantom,
no fantasy, no fairy tale.
I know the mural is there
just as I know 75,000
Salvadorans died in a war
in which the US supplied
\$6 billion in aid to the regime.
I know the mural, its scenes
as surely as I know
the Salvadoran National Guard
murdered three nuns, a laywoman.
The man who gave the command
trained at the US-sponsored
School of the Americas.
I know. I know.

Braving barking dogs,
ball-playing boys,
the beat of banda,
I have walked
from my driveway

to the mural
at noon,
at midnight,
across a continent
of passing years.

I know the martyrs, the saints,
are there. I should walk
down Guadalupe Street
to check on them,
imprint the scenes
once more
on my corneas,
but I do not have time.
The sun is too intense.
The routine is a bore.
The mural has lost its magic.
I sigh, calming my nerves,
then turn toward the house,
as reconciled
as a citizen can be
who at last has
dragged
her bin to the curb
after forgetting,
putting it off,
again and again.

— Rachel Jennings



Artwork: Fernando Llorca



Editor's note: As the school year begins from the earliest years to college campuses, we dedicate this poem to educators everywhere written by Tom Keene who writes—*Consider the power of the teacher who is kind. Years ago, in a survey of 2nd graders, they were asked what they wanted in a teacher. Almost all said, kindness. In that light, I share this poem:*

Give me a teacher

Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
needs to know more than my name,
strains for the song I have not sung,
follows me in my ennui
to find my fishing hole.

Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
seduces, surprises,
spades the soil of me,
fertilizes feelings for what is fair,
with anger at what is not,
hope for solutions,
appetite for application.



Give me a teacher who gives a damn,
who tenders truth and trust
more than rules and roles,
favors sticky freedoms
over cool controls,
who risks career and cares
to take a stand for students,
is not unknown to laugh.

I can build you a future in what I am.
when you give me a teacher who gives a damn.
Blessings,

Tom Keene, July 1986