

The Hermitage

By William J. Bly

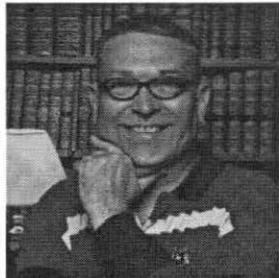
(for Fr. Bill Skeehan and Fr. Patrick Eastman)

Now that snow has fallen
and pine boughs bend to earth,
a solitary figure
black and white
from a distance: woman or man?
treks from chapel
homeward,
a hermitage among trees
amid barren hardwoods shaped as crosses.

Ask not the time of day
nor books written nor friends seen.
Let silence be its own language
let fallen leaves remain hidden;
walk past the pond's frozen countenance;
enter your cabin to find prayers waiting.
Enter your room as sanctuary;
let the fireplace fuel itself.
Watch snow gather upon window sills
as your books remain closed as cupboards.

Fill your coffee mug with prayer
and your room with God's presence.
Kneel hermit upon your prayer mat
and let hunger be your friend
embracing prayer as food;
let it fill your heart. Let prayer replace
your hunger; let solitude be your sister.
Know dear Father monk, winter blooms
frosty petals as prayer reaches like ladders
to the sky. Snow dampens your spirits not,
such purity is one color.
As prayer becomes your bride.

William J. Bly, former editor of the literary magazine *Cloud Chamber*, holds a Master's in creative writing from the University of Buffalo and has published poetry and prose in *Arizona Quarterly*, *Chouteau Review*, *Poetry Now*, *Review for Religious*, *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* and elsewhere. Raised in the Genesee Valley of New York State, for the past 28 years he has lived in Oklahoma, where he is employed by the pharmaceutical firm Sanofi-Aventis and is active in his parish, Church of the Resurrection in Tulsa.



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