

# *Vigil Light Echoes*

*Poems and Prayers  
for the Margins  
of the Month*

Rev. Patrick Dolan

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## INTRODUCTION

Why “Margins of the Month”? Our time seems to have its ups and downs, even though every season of the year, indeed every month, has a goodness and wonder to it. Most depictions of our 12-month year assign a flavor to each month from a peak experience. But that flavor fades during the month. To uplift the other times of each month, a set of poems and prayers is offered to you so that you can hallow (make sacred your way) the less-accented aspects of each month—all done from a traditional Christian perspective and my middle-of-North America context. May you hear your Creator (and each month’s creator) whispering to you through these poems and prayers anytime in the month you need to feel a sacred presence.





## DECEMBER

*In the ancient Christian traditions, the darkness of December is clothed in violet: a color of anticipation, of waiting for something, a leaning forward to prepare for it. Though various national traditions, like the feast of St. Nicholas on December 6<sup>th</sup> in the Netherlands or Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12<sup>th</sup> in Mexico, might bring a brightness to the purple of Advent that envelops December. We also know that the original Wise Men or Magi watched and waited long for something, they knew not what. We invite you to enter into their search, and rejoice in what you find.*

**Prayer:** O Infant Lord, Creator of the universe, we come to you tired and dirty from the ends of the earth—for you have knocked at the door of our hearts and revealed to us the way to salvation—by the light of a star. May your grace go before us with hope and follow after us with mercy as we run to meet you, not with gifts of gold, frankincense or myrrh, but humbly, with righteous deeds done to those we meet along the way.

# *The Magi in Advent*

Time was when the view was taught that  
Alexander's drive to conquer  
Merging culture from each nation  
Would at last fulfill the thought that  
All society could prosper.  
In this life, sophistication;  
Peacefulness within the tomb.

Wise men were we, filled with learning  
Garnered from each culture, storing  
Empty facts, a "fable weaver:"  
Well-swept hearths with nothing burning.  
E'en astrology was boring:  
Nothing new above the aether;  
Nothing new below but doom.

Forty years we watched the heavens  
Then the patterns separated,  
Leaving us with brains all humming  
Filled with groups of "twelves" and "sevens"  
Trying to descry what's fated.  
"Something's coming, something's coming"  
Say the stars and say the moon.

Soon we spied, as was our function,  
In the zodiac of Persia  
Jupiter with Mars and Venus  
Joined in one immense conjunction  
With a comet there immersed—a  
Sign that someone great had seen us:  
Stars that shone as bright as noon!

So we checked the sacred writings  
Of the nations all around us  
Till we noticed David's blessing  
Corresponded to the sightings  
And we knew that He who found us  
Sealed our work by worth impressing,  
And is coming, very soon.

Once decoded were quite clear  
Signs that came to pass this year.

God, who always had been near  
Now, in these last days, is here.



## JANUARY

*As one of the long-night months in the Earth's northern hemisphere, January is celebrated by civil society in ways that add glitter to that night with champagne toasts to inaugurate calendar and political transitions.*

*This month's poem instead carries on the Advent tradition of leaning toward something coming just after the end of the month, with lighted candles in vigil rather than glittering celebrations.*

**Prayer:** O Lord, God of the day and of the night, in this dark portion of the year, just as a tiny light can scatter the shadows that surround us, so may Christ, who is the light to all the nations, scatter the darkness in our hearts and guide our feeble, timid steps closer to you each day.

## Candlemas

Dismiss us, Lord,  
But not to rest as Simeon had earned  
Through sacred word  
And many years of temple care. He yearned  
To see your infant face.

A wintry earth  
Still needs your light that once to earth did fall.  
Complete your birth:  
Rekindle Christmas hope in one and all  
To warm each dreary place.

Like candle glow  
You guide our steps, that we might always dare  
God's love to show  
In our own lives—although we only share  
The very slightest trace.

Give us the will  
To bear the torch that lights the pilgrims' way.  
We trust that still  
Our fragile, human vessels somehow may  
Convey your wondrous grace.

## FEBRUARY

*As the fourth of the dark-night months, caused in the northern hemisphere by the tilt of planet earth, which lets the southern hemisphere experience more of the sun's radiance this season, February's flavor and weather is accentuated by the continuing absence of daylight savings time. Folks still experience longer dark evenings, to which they may have become accustomed; but many have also grown tired of the cold and darkness. Celebrations of Valentine's Day accent romantic love—and have commercialized it. Yet love is more than simply romance. There is a subtle, subsurface kind of love based on God's having loved us enough to have created the entire universe. Love is woven into its very structure and responds from its ultimate depths. Can you feel it?*

# First Flower

**Prayer:** Lord God, you who are the ultimate source of love (and of life itself), may the openness of Mary, our mother, help us welcome you into the barren landscape of our hearts—and make our love for you true.



*(A sonnet of the Blessed Virgin)*

The dreary February early dark  
Intensified the coldness of the rain  
That soaked the slate-grey world. It froze in stark  
Despair the tortured scrub and windswept plain.

When time's relentless trodding throttled shut  
The winter drizzle, snow began to melt  
And run down barren hillsides into rut  
And furrow. In the dark earth warmth was felt.

Beneath the stubble of a former crop  
The winter wheat pokes up its timid head.  
While battered cedars try in vain to stop  
Young winds all other fruit trees still play dead.

A single crocus snaps this spell of gloom  
By shouting "springtime" with its fresh white bloom.





## MARCH

*With the coming of spring in northern climes, and with the activities of Lent (including Mardi Gras), March is filled with lots of activity—including sports contests. The renewal of daylight savings time offers more useful time outside, and the festivities surrounding St. Patrick's Day start folks coming out of their homes to celebrate with song and dance and parades and more. In the process, St. Joseph's celebration is often lost along the way. Yet his life exemplifies the connection between February's romantic love and its daily activity which matures into enduring love.*



# *St. Joseph's Lilies in Mary's Kitchen*

**Prayer:** O God, without whom we cannot even exist, who have shown your love for us changeable, body-burdened creatures through the sufferings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, help us use our struggling mortifications this Lent to find the riches of your love hidden within our daily cares.

**St. Joseph's virtue overcame his pain,  
And showed his love for Mary through the years  
As husbands do with flowers now and then  
To share love's joys and wipe away life's tears.**

**When early yellow daffodils spring up  
And hyacinths their fragrant blossoms start,  
Then puppy love and first-time kisses pop  
Like apple blossoms in each teen-age heart.**

**When prayer and searching find a love sincere  
Each couple's hearts entwine with sacred vows.  
Their bridal flowers testify all year  
That love will grow as deep as time allows.**

**But kids and kitchens come along quite soon  
Like lilies spilling forth their cups of joy.  
Their parchment trumpets resonate in tune  
With mother's love and each new childhood toy.**

**Gardenias yield a soft and silky scent  
As suave as pearly moonlight on a pond.  
Their aromatic fragrance brings content:  
As soothing as a mellowed marriage bond.**

**Sweet roses accent special life events:  
From buds of pink to glowing ruby sprays.  
They waft devoted love—much like incense—  
From spring's first blush to Autumn's golden haze.**

**Each flower brings its own unique delight:  
Like orchids, who help blissful hearts take flight.**

**May trust, like Joseph's flowers, ever pure  
Help husbands' love in every age endure.**



## APRIL

*For Christians, the wonderful feast of Easter overwhelms most other concerns in April. Yet Easter, like love, endures and continues to influence our lives. With hope, we both plant seeds and study for final exams. May God's gentle hand watch over you and sustain you through the ups and downs of the seasons of your life.*

# *Life Rolls On Like Thunder After Easter*

**Prayer:** Lord God, as we drift about in the changing winds of each time and season, help us remember the pathway you have opened—and which have been trod by the multitude of saints before us. Help us resist the tempting winds of error by recalling by whose blood we have been redeemed and in whose Spirit we soar above the winds of change.

Thunder rolls, but it fades,  
And then only its echoes remain—  
For a while.

People change, like charades,  
And some leave us with heartaches and pain—  
Or a smile.

Blossoms bloom, then they die,  
While we wait for the fruit that will come:  
But not yet.

Easter hopes raised us high.  
But life's burdens can make us so numb  
We forget

That our lives blaze a trail:  
Our own pathway of valleys and peaks.  
That matures.

And though dreams sometimes fail,  
Still Christ's love walks beside us and seeks  
What endures.

So may God touch your life  
To uplift all your busy concerns  
And amaze...

You, through troubles or strife,  
How His grace helps your twisting and turns  
Run your race....  
and find His face.



## MAY

*The completion of the school year influences May; as does Mother's Day (accompanied by blooming flowers everywhere), which for many Christian groups includes a devotion to Mary the mother of Jesus. She seems to exemplify all the virtues of those flowers. Yet there is a more serious side to this month which reminds us that the freedom we cherish, and all the blessings that come with it, is not free. The cost is paid in blood by our military, who contribute a portion to the identity of every nation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, tanks have become an integral aspect of those national forces. SABOT and HEAT are types of munitions used by tanks, but they are guided by human "tankers" made in the image of God, just as we all are. We remember them at the end of the month in prayer.*

**Prayer: O wondrous  
God, who gave us our  
freedom—and the  
strength and courage to  
defend it—accept our  
actions to resist evil with  
heartfelt devotion and  
with every ounce of our  
being. May we always  
render thanks to those  
who paid dearly to hand  
down to us our faith  
and our freedoms—and  
who have shown us the  
pathway to you.**

## Tanker!

**Tanker watching in the night  
Ready to begin the fight  
With your flaming fists of steel  
Pushing forward, set to kill.**

**Let the tyrant shrink and cower  
Seeing your most noble power  
Rush into his land of fear.**

**Sabot till the way is clear.  
HEAT the ridgeline, spray the hollow.  
Punch the way that others follow.**

**Track where others would not dare.  
Boldly rumble anywhere!**

**Never do you tread alone.  
Human souls with flesh and bone  
That break and bleed make up the light  
That shines within your metal might.**

**Let your own light be your Savior  
Whose defeat of evil gave your  
Life new meaning, strength new goal.**

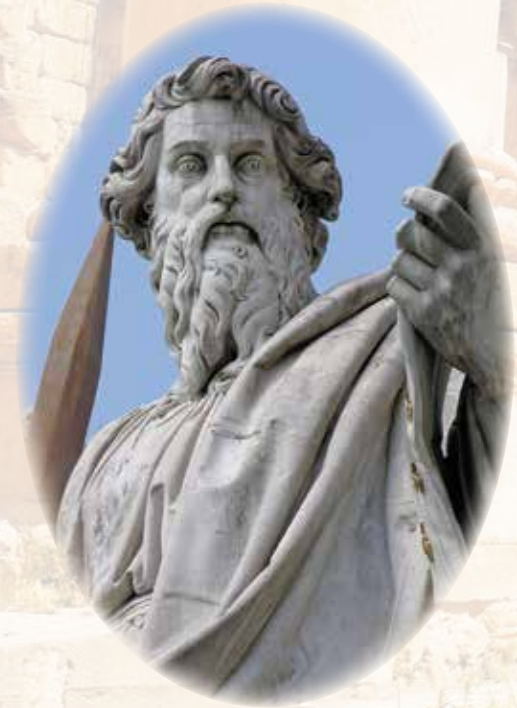
**Help Him make His world whole.**



## JUNE

*Including the summer solstice and often also including weddings, as well as the great feast of Pentecost, and vacations after graduations or other completions, June is a time to pause and look around us. In much of the world, the penultimate feast of this month is a holy day: that of Saints Peter and Paul. We often refer to them together, but they had significantly different backgrounds and looked at Christ very differently. Can we let this month be a time when their individuality helps us look at the multiple perspectives in our lives?*

# Peter & Paul



### Paul Jerusalem 31-32 AD

Near the end of all my studies, rumors first appeared.  
He just wasn't what we wanted, yet was what we truly feared:

A rustic Rabbi and a group of thugs  
Parlor tricks with loaves & fish, wine & jugs;  
Just a nuisance, just a tiny threat...  
So why is it I can't forget  
His haunting eloquence—reported second-hand  
To just our insulated, isolated band  
Of students of the real rabbi, Gamaliel the Great?  
Danger's in the very wind; I'll finish up,  
go home to Tarsus, pray & wait.

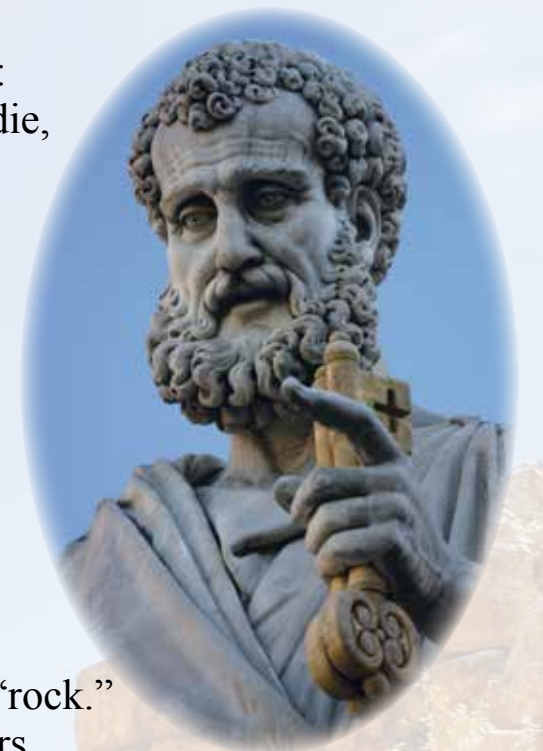
I never really knew Him but I grew to love Him.

### Peter Galilee 31-33 AD

He came into my boat and changed my luck:  
The fish now came to me. And even when I begged Him to depart  
He would not go away and leave me stuck  
With broken dreams from romance lost, with listless will and grieving heart.

He came into my home and touched the fevered brow:  
This mother who had watched her daughter fade and die,  
Whose heart and mind—grown sick from  
wond'ring how  
Our faithful God could snatch my wife instead of her,  
and why  
She still should hope or care.

Contagious was His smile,  
His hope-filled touch that healed her bitter soul  
And raised her up to wait on us again. His style  
Of speaking held us rapt in awe;  
His healing made us whole.



He came into my life and called to me; He called me “rock.”  
He trusted me—and I denied Him. Bitter were my tears.  
And yet He never gave up hope in me, His love ran deep.  
A stretch of beach in morning light, a charcoal fire, the shock  
Of icy water as I swam—His words absolved my fears  
Of utter worthlessness: “You'll feed my lambs; you'll feed my sheep.”

I never really knew Him but I grew to love Him.

### Paul Tarsus to Jerusalem 33-34 AD

My friends returned to Tarsus filled with stories of a Wind and flame  
And deacons, languages and miracles that made me fear the same  
Departure from our pure religion. I had made my life's whole aim  
The marketing to Roman hopes and dreams the clear, efficient claim:

One Temple and one God are just enough. Yet now this Steven's spread  
Contamination even there. I watched with glee this rival fall  
And championed again our awesome temple's glory. But a dread  
Kept gnawing at me: To completely halt the danger, catch them all...

I never really knew Him but I grew to love Him.

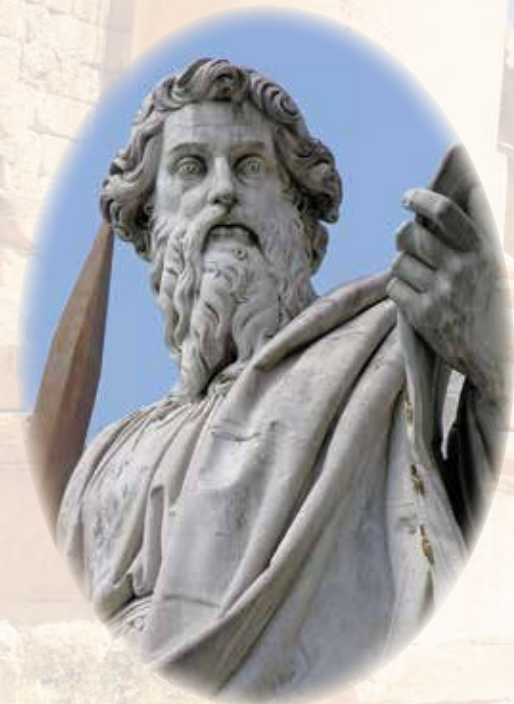


## **Peter Judea 34-5 AD**

The frequent ridicule and beatings we could face  
But Steven's murder hit us hard. Some chose to hide;  
The other brand-new deacons scattered far and wide.  
Yet even on those distant paths the Spirit's guid-  
Ing presence called to Philip: "Go, run up beside  
The Ethiopian and share your message, bring my grace."

That Great and Holy Spirit led us everywhere:  
From Joppa to a gentile's home. Yet do we dare  
Bestow the children's bread on unclean dogs? "Don't call  
What God has made unclean! Proclaim my truth to all!"

I never really knew Him but I grew to love Him.



## **Paul Damascus and beyond 35-37 AD**

Damascus road became so bright I broke and fell—  
Into His arms. His faithful friends there made  
me well.

Just how could I have been so blind? He had to hit  
Me just enough to help me see the Scriptures fit.

His call: "It's hard for you to kick against the goad"  
Began my thinking finally down a worthwhile road.

With Barnabas as guide and apostolic friend,  
Who introduced me to the group I'd hurt and feared,  
In Antioch their prayers and charity endeared  
Us to each other, letting us be called and sent  
To spread His faith with miracles. Our lives were spent  
In service to our Christ—unto the world's end.

I never really knew Him but I grew to love Him.

## **Peter and Paul from Antioch to Rome 40s to 60s**

Back and forth across the Roman world, we spread  
His sacred word and sacraments—that let men rise  
Above their petty grasping squabbles, mortal dread,  
And hedonistic lusts. His call to sacrifice  
Enabled all to know that rising from the dead  
Was their reward as well: the pearl of great price.

It cost us everything—and nothing—every day to follow Him;  
And over many years we finally grew to know Him  
and to love Him.



**Prayer:** Dear God, who have chosen to entrust the won-  
drous gifts of your grace and your sacraments to poor,  
weak mortals, grant us a glimpse of the bright rays of the  
glory of the Holy Spirit, shining in the temple of your  
Church: the bride of Christ—despite the limitations and  
weaknesses of her members.



## JULY

*A time of strong growth, full summer in northern climes, accents this month.  
We can get absorbed in that movement, or stop to notice how God is active  
in every age in our lives. Does He not sustain us without our realizing it,  
much like the nurturing house we grew up in did?*

# *Summer Murmurs from the House*

**Prayer:** O Lord, you who alone are the firm foundation for all that we build on this fallen earth, we beg your gentle guidance on us as we stumble through each phase of our lives. Make us true children of your light, shining on the winding pathway that leads to your welcoming arms and loving heart.

**You arrived in the nursery and crawled on my floors.  
Your fingerprints linger on windows and doors.  
You struggled with homework you thought was so hard,  
Then made forts in my bushes, climbed trees in my yard.  
For your birthdays and sacraments Grandparents came,  
Yet your trips to their attic made my loft look tame.  
You rejoiced to go see them each summer.**

**Strong and healthy you grew, as each school year would pass;  
You shoveled my snow, pulled up weeds and cut grass.  
Each errand for folks on your bike, then your car  
Prepared us for times when you'd journey quite far:  
Your stint in the Guard was a small price you'd pay  
To deserve all the freedoms we cherish each day.  
You'd be gone for two weeks every summer.**

**Time in college secured you a skill in your trade,  
(But was also the place where true romance was made).  
Yet each weekend you'd come home to help out your folks;  
And you brought along buddies who'd laugh at their jokes.  
When you married and began to have kids of your own  
You never forgot us, although you had grown.  
You'd come back to bring help every summer.**

**So, despite family trips or vacations each year,  
Since your kids brought your grandparents' attic stuff here  
To them I've become an adventure that's fun,  
Playing inside and outside on paths you had run.  
Yet your trips "home" each summer released your dear folks.  
Like acorns they planted which now are tall oaks.  
They grew closer to God this last summer.**

**After years you've resumed the old life here again,  
Doing chores that once used to not cause you much pain.  
May your grandkids and friends still come often to play  
In my rooms and my yard as you did in your day,  
Till you trade in your dreams from this small patch of earth  
For your true home with God who's much more than I'm worth.  
I'll help launch you forever some summer.**



## AUGUST

*Summer's heat, though helpful and needed, can become oppressive after a while. The cool and pleasant nights of August remind us, by contrast, of God's love which sustains us even as we rest—much as our mother's arms did when we slept as infants.*



# *The Soothing August Moonlight*

**Prayer:** O Lord, our God, you who made the night as well as the day, and adorned it with the stars and blessed it with the ever-changing moon to give us hope in the darkness, guide our hearts, we pray, into a deeper penetration into your merciful love through the example of Mary: a subtle light shining in the recesses of your Church.

Rich, full moon of August, the deep summer moon  
Come open our souls as you set them in tune.  
With all of creation in chorus this night,  
Refresh us with moon-glow's soft, subtle delight.

In darkness and cold our dear Savior was born  
But comforted gently that first Christmas morn  
By Mary—who later stood under His cross.  
May we feel her presence when we endure loss.

Dear Mary, like moonlight, bring comfort and hope  
Like a cool, welcome breeze as we're trying to cope  
With our toil in the heat doing burdensome chores.  
Help us to have faith and devotion like yours.

We relinquish to you all our labors and cares  
And entrust to successors our duties and prayers.  
Help each generation with your tender care  
Rise up to the challenges facing them there.

As we lay down our burdens and worries each night  
Prepare us to one day walk into Christ's light,  
Forgiving each other for things said or done,  
Accepting within us the victory He won.

May each of our efforts, our strivings and goals,  
Now rise up like incense when placed on hot coals  
To merge with angelic songs God set in place:  
Bright shining like moonlight and filled with Christ's grace.

As the night fades with sunrise, may we ever stay  
Still ready to offer our efforts each day:  
Continuing always, devoted and true  
As we follow that moonlit path home up to you.





## SEPTEMBER

*School years resume in September, and life seems to take on a renewed and focused sense of purpose. But unless that purpose is other-centered, our lives will end in empty selfishness. The feast of Holy Cross reminds us that we can offer everything back to God our loving Creator just as Jesus did on the cross.*

# September's Renewed Purpose

**Prayer:** Lord, God of endings and beginnings, whose pathways cross and merge in our lives, give wisdom to those who guide us in every age and season: diligent shepherds and valiant witnesses to the wonder of your mercy. Help us harvest and preserve the good done by your devoted faithful throughout these times of transition and renewal. May we reverence all creation as your gift, watched over by archangels and leading us back through the arms of your cross to your sacred heart.

We can stumble through life without purpose or goal,  
And then ask why our world seems out of control...

Each September's arrival should jostle our heart.  
With the end of our summertime's warm days and nights,  
When our water sports lessen and school sports start,  
A renewed sense of purpose comes into our sights.

Since it's cool, but not cold, we can find time and room  
For new fires in our hearths, and for homework that's due.  
Trees reveal their first colors—while roses still bloom  
Like renewed school friendships, still faithful and true.

Lest we waste all our summertime's efforts or joys,  
Let us sanctify them with a purposeful choice.

As we, or our grand kids, begin each new grade  
Can't our daily endeavors, before each sun sets,  
Be much more than survival—or pleasures that fade:  
Be a chance to redeem our lost hopes and regrets?

Might we elevate goals beyond conquests, or greed?  
For we're more than just onlookers, part of a chain  
Of consumers who seem to have all that we need:  
For unless there is meaning, our lives have no gain.

Giving voice to creation through prayer is our role,  
For we each are the child to whom God gave a soul.

If our hopes remain selfish, they've lost that true chance  
To make each year's achievements a part of the song  
That gives voice to creation—and lets people dance  
In harmonious justice where all sing along.

Gentle, powerful God, you who balance all seasons:  
Help September's transitions draw hope from each loss;  
For Christ's sacrifice gives us those purpose-filled reasons  
To offer our works through the arms of His cross.



# Out of October's Shadows

The pleasant sun shines one last glance of hope  
As it retreats toward southern skies. Earth yields  
Few reassuring signs to help us cope  
With longer, colder nights and empty fields.

Yet Barren hills reveal the shape of earth  
Where sacred fingerprints emerge to show  
How dark and light were both part of the birth  
God set in place to let creation grow.

Though days grow short as leaves begin to drop,  
And cold winds mar the brilliant evening sky,  
These cries of nature warn that we can't stop  
The hands of time that claim we too will die.

When bones creak just from rocking on the porch,  
And daily tasks include rest in the shade,  
These tell us that it's time to pass the torch.  
“For new to shine what's older needs to fade.”

That chance to shine brings its attendant fear  
Of what our lives have written on each page.  
Both noble and more shadowed acts appear;  
Yet shadows can be faced in every age.

For shadows come because there is a light  
That shines for even just a little while,  
To help reveal the paths and choice that's right  
For every generation's special style.

Though we prefer to keep life shining bright,  
We never would see stars without the night.

Life grows—then fades—as part of God's design  
To help us soar from “earthbound” to divine.

## OCTOBER

*Transitions, even when accompanied by flamboyant colors all around us, can carry a touch of fear. Our lives on earth are temporary, but still worthwhile—each in their own way and proper season. God's love overcomes all fear.*

**Prayer:** O Lord, God of all seasons, as we approach the darker and colder months of the year, let us be filled with the warmth of your love—as the worries of this world grow dim and the treasures of your kingdom begin to be revealed. In your mercy, pardon what conscience dreads, and let our guardian angels protect us from all evil spirits. Grant our departed faithful the chance to gaze on the healing radiance of your face.



## NOVEMBER

*Though the church, like individual church buildings, may at times seem dark and cold  
and unresponsive, it is a safe and holy place for souls to launch their prayers back to God.  
Different as those prayers are, they warm up that house of God with their devotion and love.*

# Vigil Light Echoes

When all the leaves have fallen, and most have blown away,  
Churches in late afternoon feel dark and cold and gray.  
But echoes linger from the prayers offered there each day.

The Crimson Sanctuary lamp brings comfort by its glow  
But far up near the tabernacle, it's hard for it to know  
The anguished prayer-filled longings rising from the pews below.

Yet some smaller candles closer to those pews  
Launch those prayers as they burn bright.  
And for just a few brief hours,  
Filled with all those hopes and sorrows,  
Tiny candles beam their pleading upward in the winter night.

Subtle echoes linger on the coins and on the bills  
That trembling hands had dropped into the offering-filled box.  
When after Vespers on a wear'ing day, the priest unlocks  
And gathers up those scattered offerings—the toils, the thrills,  
The heartaches, hopes and worries seem to paint their subtle hues  
And soaring shadows on those flick'ring candles as they burn.

Their poignant stories touch his hands and somehow seem to yearn  
To transfer deep inside him as he counts them each in turn.

\$5

Largest was a crisp five dollar  
Neatly folded for the slot.  
It came from a seasoned mother  
Grateful for the kids she's got.

Yet her teens and twenty-somethings,  
Like her parents, still need care:  
She suspects they each still try things  
That they know they should not dare.

\$1

A crumpled dollar reeked of teen-age guilt.  
Although no theft occurred or blood been spilt,  
Yet he had stayed out late and slept through Mass—  
And hoped this buck might buy him one week's pass.

\$1

One other dollar was replete with prayers  
Lovingly folded—but weighed down with cares.  
It had been carried for years now with joy  
Earned doing yard work when he was a boy.  
Painfully offered: it's all that he had.

No job and few prospects for this anguished dad  
Whose wife and young children kept praying at home:  
Still hoping employment of some kind would come.

The parish had helped with expenses like rent,  
For all of their savings had long since been spent.  
Still strong was his faith, but now fading his hope.  
So searching through dumpsters was how he would cope  
With finding some sustenance needed to feed  
His little ones looking to him in their need.



**\$.50**

Wishing it could help that neighbor's boy but knowing it could not,  
The only fifty cent piece in the box each week, for sixty years,  
Keeps an old man's vow each paycheck—and donates this fraction more.  
Memories adhere of times his arms were strong and wits less dull.

Great-grandchildren take his nickels now that once his toddlers got.  
Fearing he would be a burden, he keeps hidden that he hears  
Voices of his wife and school-mates calling from beyond some door.  
All too soon the Lord will stamp his payday promise "paid in full."

**\$.25**

Gently nestled nearby was a quarter that came  
As the typical cost, and with aches all the same  
As each widow who rattles alone in her house:  
With her kids on their own and bereft of her spouse.

Though she's still independent she waits for their calls,  
But their oft-postponed visits now litter her halls.  
"Every week I thank God when they promise to come;  
So I fix their big meal—yet still eat alone."

**\$.10**

In the back of the box hid an old silver dime.  
Six decades ago it remembered the time  
When just it alone could still pay for a cup  
Of hot soup or coffee—and some place to stop  
Away from the cold of the night—or the hearts  
Of the wage-earning folks who chased bums from these parts.

**\$.05**

Like the other four saved from lunch money, this bright nickel too had come  
With a tiny child's tear-filled plea, whose tender love had not grown numb:  
"Baby Jesus, care for all our soldiers—and please bring my daddy home."

**\$.01**

The penny and its double dozen others understood that prayer,  
A wounded vet had scavenged them, who, like his buddies, came and went.  
By giving up some cigarettes and keeping them from being spent  
He'd saved enough to offer them for missing comrades everywhere.

With gnarled hands he'd knelt and lit his candle, hoping it would shout:  
"Alone we each don't count for much, but joined together we can buy  
This little flame to intercede for all of us and voice our cry:  
'Tonight, Lord, give us one more chance to shine before we all burn out.'"

As coins and bills passed from his hand  
Their pleadings seeped into his heart.

He knelt and tried to understand  
How each of them had done their part  
In setting lose those soaring needs  
To resonate around God's throne.

These funds would help with other deeds  
Of grace known but to God alone.  
The vigil light resources there  
Will bring new help to young and old.

And warmed by echoes from each prayer  
The church now feels much less cold.

Prayer: Lord, God of wonder and delight, we long for you as we carry our burdens through every stage of our lives. Accept, we beg you, the tiny gifts we offer in thanksgiving for your many blessings throughout the decades of those lives. Deign to warm your church, built of living stones and joined together by the mortar of your grace and your sacraments—with the gentle intensity of your divine love for us, so that it may stand firm and radiate your wonder as we seek to continue your sacred work—until your kingdom dawns complete.



EPILOGUE:

HISTORY OF THE POEMS AND WHEN THEY WERE COMPOSED

Many of these poems were published by *Emmanuel Magazine* and their kindly editors over the years. “Tanker” was published by Armor Magazine, and is likely the only poem ever published there. Poems for July, August and September were completed after Emmanuel Magazine ceased publication (after 75 years due to printing expenses and the advent of social media).

January: [February 1979, in the Highlands in Louisville, Kentucky] inspired by the school children processing from school through the snow to church and singing “This Little Light of Mine...”

February: [March 1976, Rome] for a class on Mariology, inspired by a phrase in a fellow student’s posted poem: “Spring is here, but not yet.”

March: [Spring 2015, Fairdale, KY] inspired by examples of married love blooming in the lives of the faithful.

April: [September 2016, Wiesbaden, Germany] after an AMI congress in the Netherlands, and while visiting with a long-time friend and fellow soldier, Bishop Rick Spencer of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, sitting on the couch in his living room.

May: [Spring/Summer, 1990, Camp Casey, Korea] in tribute to those who served in Desert Storm: January-February 1990, the First Gulf War.

June: [Winter 2006, Frankfort, KY] working as State Chaplain for Kentucky and seeing the interaction between wonderful leaders in the state—but thinking about the early leaders in the Church.

July: [September 2023, the Highlands in Louisville, KY] while recovering from TBI after being hit on my bicycle by a pick-up truck driven by a High School Student.

August: [Spring 2022, Southern Kentucky Missions] inspired by my Aunt Lila with whom I would exchange poetry ideas (and who died at age 97 on Holy Saturday 2024).

September: [Autumn 2021, Southern Kentucky Missions] inspired by the harvest going on around me and the local schools across the street from Good Shepherd Church in Columbia, KY.

October: [Autumn 2019, Leuven, Belgium] while researching the connection between science and theology.

November: [Spring-Summer 2011, Phoenix, AZ] while working as a Brigade General, the assistant to the Chief of Army Chaplains all over the country and world.

December: [Advent 1977, Rome] In the school system in the Roman Seminary, there are two semesters, each with three seasons, approximately a month long each. The first semester consists of Fall, Advent and PUSH (a time for reviewing or cramming for exams). In my Deacon year, the first semester consisted of a fall from October 15<sup>th</sup> (beginning of classes) to Thanksgiving, when Advent essentially began; then after the Christmas break PUSH went through the end of that break till Ash Wednesday. During the Advent time frame in 1977 the ideas and rhythm for the poem crept into my soul as Advent devotions moved through that cloudy and rainy season. Back then, St. Peter’s Basilica was open all day (when most everything was closed for lunch and siesta) and had no barriers or security; so one could walk into that building and would be essentially alone in it. At that point it almost speaks to you in its own way—without the crowds—and reveals its personality and history. The centuries dropped away, and the Magi, as they were trying to decide what the star was and what it might be telling them (and how they should respond) let me in on their story. I was still just a seminarian and a scientist, struggling to follow my (almost there) priestly calling in a strange environment. The Magi helped me through it.

AUTHOR’S ORDAINED ASSIGNMENTS (LOCATIONS)

Summer 1977 St. Augustine, Louisville, African American

1978-1982 St. James, Louisville, Highlands, middle class, university related, & Teaching at Spalding Univ.

1982-1984 St. Augustine, Lebanon, rural, multi-racial, early foundation & teaching at St. Catherine College

1984-1985 Immaculate Conception, LaGrange, & St. Matthews, Bedford and prisons, rural changing to high class homes

1985-1986 4 months in Rome, then Our Lady Help of Christians in Valley Station, blue collar, retired military

1986-1987 St. Peter & Paul, Danville & St. Mary’s in Perryville, both ancient and multi-racial, Center College

1987-1989 US Army in Germany, Holland and Fr. Hood, TX

1990 US Army Korea

1991 US Army Ft. Monmouth, N.J. chaplains career course

1991-1992 US Army Ft. Gordon, GA

1992-1998 Holy Rosary, Springfield, African American and rural [deployment for Bosnia for 4 months] (tribunal duties)

Summer 1998 US Army Ecuador

1998-2004 St. Christopher, Radcliff, rural, international, military flavored [Activated away from the parish for 5 months and deployment to Iraq for 2 months] (tribunal duties)

2004-2005 US Army Harvard University [deployment to Iraq]

2005-2007 US Army Iraq & Egypt, then Frankfort, KY, with state government (tribunal duties)

2007-2013 St. Bernard, Clementsville, and Sacred Heart, Liberty, very rural [short deployments worldwide] (tribunal duties)

2013-2019 St. Teresa of Calcutta, Fairdale, semi-rural Louisville, blue collar (tribunal duties)

Summer 2019 Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

2019-2021 retired at Our Mother of Sorrows, mid-city Louisville & helping at U. of Louisville Campus Ministry (tribunal duties)

2021-2024 Holy Spirit, Jamestown, Good Shepherd, Columbia, Holy Redeemer, Greensburg, rural (mission) (tribunal duties)

2024-present Senior Associate at St. Steven Martyr parish, Louisville (tribunal duties)

Total: 16 different parish communities plus military bases worldwide.



Fr. Patrick J. Dolan is a priest of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville, KY, ordained in 1978, after 15 years in the seminary which included earning a PhD in chemistry from Indiana University in 1974, followed by studies in Rome. His theology background includes an STB in Scripture, an MA in sacraments, an STL in medical ethics and an STD in just war theory. As the Ecclesiastical Assistant for Apostolat Militaire International (a Vatican connected NGO), he has used all this training all over the world (as well as in his many parishes) in more ways than expected. He served in the US Army for nearly 28 years, retiring as a Brigadier General chaplain, after having mentored the senior chaplains in each state and provided special care for all the general officers in the National Guard.



Fr. Pat has published many articles in various fields from history to explaining the Eucharist to scientists, to colors of spirituality, to gaming theory. He has written music and published a 4-volume series of adventure stories about the Bluegrass area in Kentucky called *Traces of Magic*, which is designed to help those who have drifted from the Catholic church to be intrigued by this adventure story (which is permeated with Catholic heritage) and perhaps find their spark of faith rekindled. This present volume of poems is offered for your enjoyment, but also to encourage others; for if a chemist can compose poetry, anyone can do anything.

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