

**Christ Church + Washington Parish**  
**The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli**  
**First Sunday after Christmas 2018**

On the Sunday after Christmas, the attendance is lower. We've had the big celebration Monday - that still counts for weekly worship. People are away visiting family. People are taking it easy. But you are here! Why are you here? I know why I'm here; I know why Richard is here, but dear ones, why are you here? You could of had the Sunday "off" guilt-free.

Perhaps your answer is - it's Sunday morning, where else would I be?

Worship is a rhythm that shapes us - the same rituals week after week, the same or similar words fill our ears and come from our mouths, bread and wine feeding us. It is liturgy that has been formed over the centuries to point us towards God, to join us together in prayer strengthening the connection between us, to remind us of who we are and who God is and that the context of our lives is bigger than the limits of our immediate perceptions and challenges. These rituals, these words, this worship washes over us, forming our minds and hearts, until confession, peace, prayer, communion, blessing are not just titles on a bulletin but concepts that shapes our everyday living.

It is the Episcopal way. Episcopalians believe in slow cooker religion. We put all the ingredients in there - the right ingredients - and turn it to warm, and expect everything will cook and we'll all come out well-formed Christians - eventually. Now we could definitely stand to turn the cooker to low, maybe even high, once in awhile because you know, not everything can

cook on warm. But we'll never be an Instapot denomination - no matter how popular those darn things become.

Today though I'm going to celebrate the slow cooker turned to "warm" that the Episcopal Church tends to be. This is a good, warm Sunday, a day to let the liturgy wash over you and soak it in. No holiday. No complicated theological point. No call to radical transformation.

A day to just be in worship and let liturgy do its thing.

With that in mind, I share with you a poem. A picture of what it means to be part of a community whose worship routine may be considered barely warm when it comes to effort and time, but whose cumulative impact leaves an impression on the soul. It is by the contemporary Irish poet, Paul Durcan.

The 12 O'Clock Mass, Roundstone, County Galway, 28 July 2002

On Sunday 28th of July 2002-  
The summer it rained almost every day -  
In rain we strolled down the road  
To the church on the hill overlooking the sea.  
I had been told to expect "a fast Mass".  
Twenty minutes. A piece of information  
Which disconcerted me.

Out onto the altar hurried  
A short, plump priest in late middle age  
With a horn of silver hair,  
In green chasuble billowing  
Like a poncho or a caftan over  
White surplice and a pair  
Of Reeboks - mammoth trainers.

He whizzed along,  
Saying the readings himself as well as the Gospel;  
Yet he spoke with conviction and with clarity;  
His every action an action  
Of what looked like effortless concentration;  
Like Tiger woods on top of his form.  
His brief homily concluded with a solemn request.

To the congregation he gravely announced:  
“I want each of you to pray for a special intention,  
A very special intention.  
I want each of you - in the sanctity of your souls -  
To pray that, in the All-Ireland  
Championship hurling quarter-final this afternoon in Croke Park,  
Clare will beat Galway.”

The congregation splashed into laughter  
And the church became a place of effortless prayer.  
He whizzed through the Consecration  
As if the Consecration was something  
That occurs at every moment of the day and night;  
As if betrayal and the overcoming of betrayal  
Were an every-minute occurrence.

As if the Consecration were the “now”  
In the “now” of the Hail Mary prayer:  
“Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.”  
At the Sign of the Peace he again went sombre  
As he instructed the congregation:  
“I want each of you to turn around and say to each other:  
‘You are beautiful.’”

The congregation was flabbergasted, but everyone fluttered  
And swung around and uttered that extraordinary phrase:  
“You are beautiful.”

I shook hands with at least five strangers,  
Two men and three women, to each of them saying:  
“You are beautiful.” And they to me:  
“You are beautiful.”

At the end of Mass, exactly twenty-one minutes,  
The priest advised: "Go now and enjoy yourselves  
For that is what God made you to do -  
To go out there and enjoy yourselves  
And to pray that, in the All-Ireland  
Championship hurling quarter-final between Clare and Galway  
In Croke Park, Clare will win."

After Mass, the rain had drained away  
Into a tide of sunlight on which we sailed out  
To St. Macdara's Island and dipped our sails -  
Both of us smiling, radiant sinners.  
In a game of pure delight, Clare beat Galway by one point:  
Clare 1 goal and 17 points, Galway 19 points.  
"Pray for us now and at the hour of our death."

May the service today, in Paul's words in his letter to the Colossians, may the service today "let the word of Christ dwell in you."

The 12 O’Clock Mass, Roundstone, County Galway, 28 July 2002  
Irish Poet: Paul Durcan

On Sunday 28th of July 2002-  
The summer it rained almost every day -  
In rain we strolled down the road  
To the church on the hill overlooking the sea.  
I had been told to expect “a fast Mass”.  
Twenty minutes. A piece of information  
Which disconcerted me.

Out onto the altar hurried  
A short, plump priest in late middle age  
With a horn of silver hair,  
In green chasuble billowing  
Like a poncho or a caftan over  
White surplice and a pair  
Of Reeboks - mammoth trainers.

He whizzed along,  
Saying the readings himself as well as the Gospel;  
Yet he spoke with conviction and with clarity;  
His every action an action  
Of what looked like effortless concentration;  
Like Tiger woods on top of his form.  
His brief homily concluded with a solemn request.

To the congregation he gravely announced:  
“I want each of you to pray for a special intention,  
A very special intention.  
I want each of you - in the sanctity of your souls -  
To pray that, in the All-Ireland  
Championship hurling quarter-final this afternoon in Croke Park,  
Clare will beat Galway.”

The congregation splashed into laughter  
And the church became a place of effortless prayer.  
He whizzed through the Consecration  
As if the Consecration was something  
That occurs at every moment of the day and night;

As if betrayal and the overcoming of betrayal  
Were an every-minute occurrence.

As if the Consecration were the “now”  
In the “now” of the Hail Mary prayer:  
“Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.”  
At the Sign of the Peace he again went sombre  
As he instructed the congregation:  
“I want each of you to turn around and say to each other:  
‘You are beautiful.’”

The congregation was flabbergasted, but everyone fluttered  
And swung around and uttered that extraordinary phrase:  
“You are beautiful.”

I shook hands with at least five strangers,  
Two men and three women, to each of them saying;  
“You are beautiful.” And they to me:  
“You are beautiful.”

At the end of Mass, exactly twenty-one minutes,  
The priest advised: “Go now and enjoy yourselves  
For that is what God made you to do -  
To go out there and enjoy yourselves  
And to pray that, in the All-Ireland  
Championship hurling quarter-final between Clare and Galway  
In Croke Park, Clare will win.”

After Mass, the rain had drained away  
Into a tide of sunlight on which we sailed out  
To St. Macdara’s Island and dipped our sails -  
Both of us smiling, radiant sinners.  
In a game of pure delight, Clare beat Galway by one point:  
Clare 1 goal and 17 points, Galway 19 points.  
“Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.”