

# A Communion of Saints

## Poems by Jason Charnesky

### 1. Saints

*They are of us and come from us  
then go through us just to show us  
all we know as the hard world of  
sheer fact is too apt to be shattered by love.*

### 2. The Shepherd's Tale

*How rudely stabled birthed ye, babe,  
With moaning cow and oxen,  
That noone waited news of ye  
Save lambs who leapt in frolic  
And the mother's husband hard with care  
Of doubt in what lay sleeping?  
That miserable and storming night  
Not once gave pause to thunder.  
No stars ran off their frozen track  
To spy upon your labor.  
But all tongues wag about your birth  
And each adds a new wonder.  
Now talking donkeys praising God  
Are claimed to have attended,  
And through the course of rooms and bars  
Your magic birth gets mended,  
Embellished in the telling over  
Spicy wine and wassails.  
The Bethlem crowd enjoyed the tales  
Of country bumpkin Davids  
And secret saviours born in sties  
By mother made a virgin.  
It's all laughed off as this year's ruse,  
A Nazarean rumor.*

*Tales have their season of street talk  
Before they're all forgotten.  
No prince would so unseemly rise  
From barnyard manger cribstraw,  
A king were better bred and boarded  
Than lay amid such offal.  
They'll kill ye, boy, in gossip ere  
Ye find your sense of reason,  
No saviour ever slept with kine or found a father wanting.  
T'were better born a shepherd than  
A riddle in a barnyard. I'd side with them.  
It makes no sense  
To talk of promised comets  
Or wonders of a thousand nights  
Befalling all upon us  
To take the punishment we mete  
With God's own offered infant.  
One night to wipe out all our debt.  
I'd side with them, except  
I saw my sheep bolt down the hill  
Afraid of sudden thunder,  
And heard the song the thunder sang  
In a sky gone live with angels.*

### 3. Mary Magdalene Remembers Ascension Thursday

*Clouds tossed around like graveclothes  
That morning, spring mud held our footing  
Where our ankles sank.  
He laughed, he laughed*

*Lighter than life, taught us dance  
Barely touching the tips of grass.*

#### **4. Francis of Assisi Relates a Strange Tale**

*A wolf lives in my house.  
He came one night to make me his meal.  
And I pitied his hunger and fed him my heart.  
I let him sup upon my sinew and bone.  
Till, sated on my flesh, he slept  
Quiet at my feet.  
Poor rash creature, who dare call you cruel?  
God's little workman chewing at our bone, leaving us nothing to call our own.  
You grant us perfect poverty.  
Now settle down to share my nothing, my all, my pet, my body, my anguish, my tempter, my peace.*

#### **5. A Couple of Saints**

*Benedictus, nondescript and nondescriptive, grew vindictive:  
"Why should sainthood try to taint good blood?  
That ain't what saints should be.  
Holy prissy sissies whose vast blisses blast them like Ulysses' hubris, whose ensuing penance went as far as  
Timbuctu and Ithaca.  
Though mythical, he paradigms the pithy Pa they praise as Father, crazed marauder, getting kitten fits in heaven.  
Why can't we be paganly and take a break from sanctity?  
Why can't we be paganly and take a break from sanctity?  
Blessed Simplicius kept to a hollow and prayed.  
At night whippoorwill were his pillow.*

#### **6. Saint Jerome Considers His Decorum**

*You can't boil water in your mother's tennis shoes.  
You can't cook the kitty in the toaster.  
You can't eat the chair or stick the mattress up your nose.  
It's hard not to do what you ain't supposed ter.*

#### **7. Saint Teresa Recites a Litany of the Assumption**

*O Mary! My Mary, dear mother of God,  
O Mary of blue as the sky without cloud,  
O Mary of tears in a darkroom,  
O Mary slaughtered by the angel,  
O Mary torn away by words,  
O Mary, blessed fruited womb.  
Mary with a sword in your belly.  
Mary necessary sacrifice.  
Your girlhood turned maternal for a mystery.  
O Mary, my Mary, I do not come to pray (my own soul in the keeping of St. Jude) in this half flight of candles I fear  
the flickers of your alabaster blood upon the serpent's head.  
Were you ever seen in laughter, my sad Mary?  
Or did the shadow of the imponderable stretch over even infant joys?  
I like to think of sunny days in what is less a desert than a promise before want gets gift, where dust is roaming  
farmland and every child a king of what isn't yet.  
There on the cusp of history you would search the fields for flowers like a crazy otter balancing the sun on your  
nose and everything else hangs over the edge of a cliff that holds all the past.*

#### **8. Saint Agatha's Last Prayer**

*Give me your face  
O be my memory  
Hold me here again  
When I am gone  
Your eyes see me  
Hear nothing else  
I die, so do we all.  
But you O be in you  
Move to me O stay!  
O make us, make us love Interminably.*