

## Animal Sacrifice

*In Nomine Patris, et filii, et Spiritus Sancti...*

There is something about the ocean  
that is like being in a great temple.  
I sit here, on my stone pew,  
the sandy dune my kneeling bench.  
The midnight sky-dome  
of nature's cathedral,  
the stars like flecks of  
paint spattered onto canvas,  
is reflected in the moon-leashed ocean.  
The waves chant an everlasting prayer,  
the same one they have sung  
since their birth at the hour of genesis.  
The congregation of animals,  
on the land, in the sea, and in the sky  
are alive as I am alive.  
From a cloud of sea-salt  
the fin of the dolphin reaches toward  
the outstretched hand.  
A vision of God is burned  
forever into the amber  
of the gull as it dives for fish,  
is present in the teeth of the shark  
as they sink into flesh,  
is praised in the chorus of barking seals.

*Sicut erat in principio, et nune, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum.*

In the beginning there was nothing.  
Then God created the heaven and the earth  
and the seas and the trees.  
Animals came  
to live in the garden,

to graze on the grass,  
drink from the pristine waters,  
and find joy in His creation.  
And it was good.  
Then God created  
MAN.

*O Deus, O Deus, quare me repulisti?*

The ocean churns before me,  
the waves rising and falling  
like the chest of a man  
in troubled sleep.  
From my second story window  
I can look down on the graying beach,  
the black oil a mourning shawl  
on the shoulders of an aged woman,  
a dying Mother.  
I notice the dead seals and fish, birds and kelp,  
that denote the line of the receding tide.  
Several people are crowded around a baby seal  
just cut from the womb  
of its once playful, proud mother.  
She is now lying on her side,  
her eyes glazed with the oil of her baptism,  
her coat slick with the anointing of last rights.  
The people work quickly to save the infant,  
their hands shaking with futility.  
Wrapped in swaddling, the child gasps,  
its chest rising unevenly, shudders,  
the little brown nose quivers, shaking the whiskers.  
Eyes not yet open, never open.  
Et mortuus est.  
The waves chant a dirge-like lullaby.

*Requiescat in pace.*

• Shannon K. Murphy