

*Transcendentals*

# Poor in Spirit

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## NEWS FROM THE FRONT

A blessed autumn to all of our readers and prayerful supporters.

Our theme for October, Poor in Spirit, reflects the first beatitude given by Our Lord in Matthew 5: "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." But how can we apply this to our own lives?

Special Guest Contributor, Robyn Aguila, offers a solution to this question. Though not all of us may experience physical poverty, we certainly will succumb to spiritual poverty; and that is a good thing! Robyn shares her personal experience combined with scripture to encourage us to be beggars for the Lord.

This is also our first issue where we publish a piece of extended verse. We hope this lovely piece will inspire your inner writer.

Thank you and may God love you.

*Transcendentals*



## Becoming Beggars

by Robyn Aguila

Anna sat on the cold cement sidewalk in the heart of downtown as she observed the bustling foot traffic - rushing to catch the bus, rushing to get to work, rushing to get to school, rushing to meet someone. Rushing. She sat, a posture quite jarring to her restless atmosphere, and held an empty coffee cup repurposed for loose change in one hand, and a tattered cardboard sign that read "Anything helps. God Bless" in the other. Though she was silent, her longing countenance spoke volumes, inviting pedestrians to slow down and respond to her material poverty. Like everyone else, Clara was rushing, though she didn't know where. It would

have been easier to continue in a brisk walk and avoid eye contact. But as Clara continued in her orbit, she was pulled by the gravity of Anna's gaze, which not only compelled Clara to slow down, but to come to a complete stop. Clara, a university student with very little to give, felt ashamed as she became aware of her own inadequacies. She felt like she had nothing to offer but her faith, encouragement, and time, and she knew they would never be enough to feed Anna. Yet the young and naive girl timidly asked Anna if she could sit with her, and Anna graciously welcomed her. As they both sat together, the two women shared their names, stories, and warm hearts. Few would stop to give money, never mind

the food that they had bought for themselves. Clara was inspired by the joy that Anna exuded, her extreme gratitude for the small donations, and was humbled to witness her generosity as Anna offered the food she was given to Clara. Anna also shared how she ended up on the streets, the immense love she has for her daughter, and her unwavering faith in God throughout all the difficulties of her life. Clara always felt compassion for the less fortunate, but never thought she could experience this much love for the stranger on the street. While Clara thought she could share the hope she had within her, she felt as though she gave nothing and received so much more instead. Suddenly, it became apparent to Clara that her own soul was impoverished and hungry, but Anna's material poverty made her wealthy in faith, hope, and love. As it was time for Clara to leave, Anna helped her up and hugged her. At that moment, she no longer saw Anna, but Jesus Christ.

Coming face to face with the impoverished in our society can evoke many feelings and reactions: compassion, generosity, and a desire to help; pity and sadness for the person; judgement from presumptions of their situation; caution out of safety concerns; apathy or indifference to seeing so many people begging; even hostility

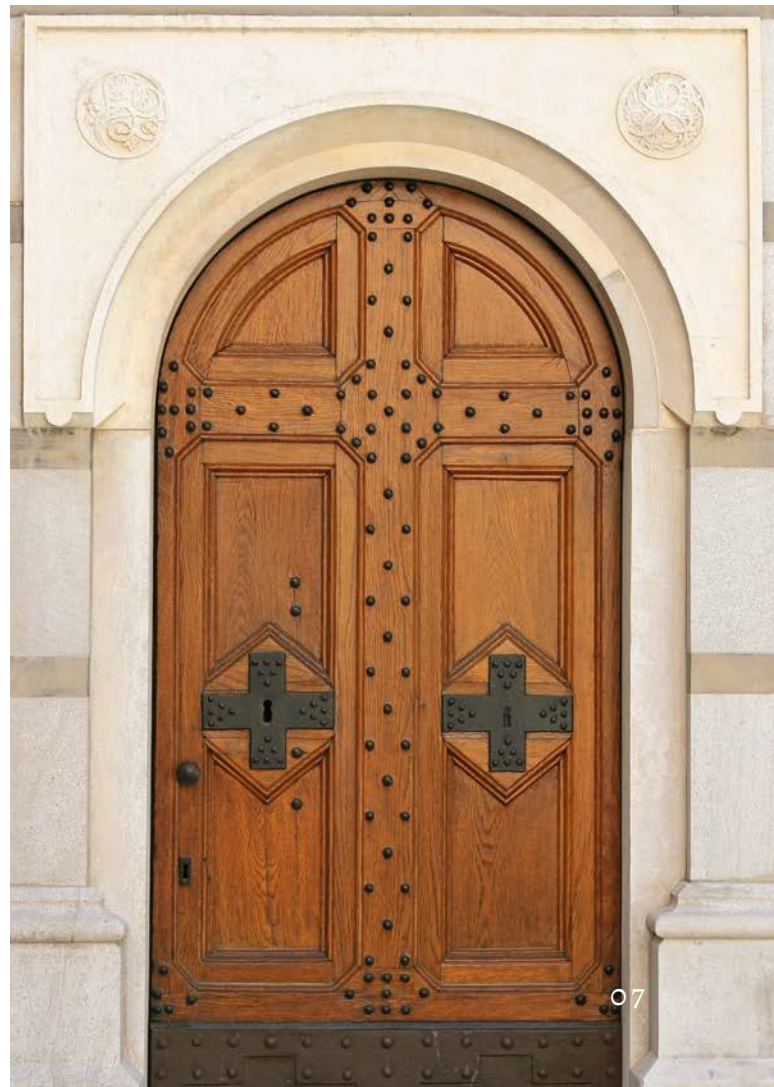
arising from an "Us vs. Them" mentality. However, we must ask ourselves: am I really that different? While material and external poverty is the most apparent form of poverty, poverty manifests itself in different ways. An extreme need or lack can be experienced internally in all aspects of the human person: whether spiritually, mentally, emotionally, or physically. We need to confront our own poverty and allow ourselves to be poor in spirit in order to deeply experience God's abundant love and be rich in His mercy.

In the past year, I experienced the height of my own poverty as I continued to navigate through several health conditions which affect my mental clarity, energy, mood, weight, and physical appearance. I was doing everything I could to seek help from health care professionals as I clung onto their MD, ND, NP, RD titles and accolades for hope, despite their advice leading me nowhere. I was doing everything I could to work even harder - in my spiritual life, in taking care of my health and wellbeing, in my job serving in ministry, and in my studies - just to feel like I was only barely functioning. I was doing everything I could to please everyone around me even when it felt like my body was failing me. I was doing everything I could to stay optimistic and maintain a positive outlook. Aye,

there's the rub: I was doing everything. Have I not read enough Scripture, or English literature, to know that hubris would lead to my own *hamartia*? God was stripping away everything I took pride in. I turned back to God and finally admitted to Him and myself that I have nothing, and have absolutely nothing left to give to the people in my life and to God. My weakness and poverty humbled me, and I became a beggar for the Lord's grace.

God, in His gentleness and kindness, reaffirmed me in those times I felt like my offerings to the Lord were so meager and worthless. God saw in my efforts something similar to the Widow's Offering: "[She] put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasure. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything else she had, all she had to live on" (Mk 12:43-44). When we feel like we do not have enough left to give (whether it be time, energy, money), yet we continue to strive to give our best, it never goes unnoticed by the Lord. It is more than enough for Him to work with. Nevertheless, we must come to accept that our efforts will never truly be enough. But God alone is enough. His grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in our weakness (cf 2 Cor 12:9).

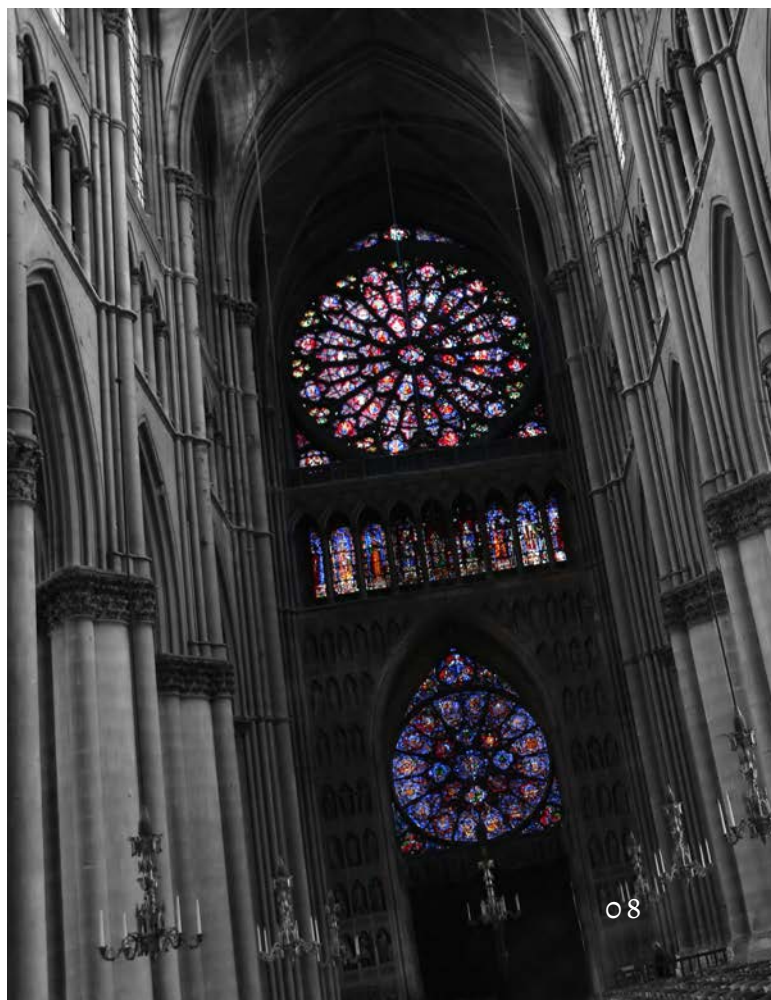
In these moments where we are challenged by our own human limitations, our insufficiency reveals an immense need that only God can fill. God proposes an invitation to hope in His Word and His promise: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). Heaven no longer remains a distant reality, but the Kingdom of God becomes present for those who embrace their inadequacies and spiritual poverty. Here and now, Jesus abides with the lowly and dwells in the broken and empty spirits. We learn to be utterly dependent on His provision, and to receive freely all of the gifts our Heavenly Father generously offers.



We enter into this world with nothing and leave this world with nothing, as we are dust and to dust we shall return (cf. Gen 3:19). Therefore accepting poverty is accepting the human condition. The sooner we accept this, the sooner we experience freedom, the fullness of life, and joy. The Gospels further reveal that in serving the poor and becoming poor, God becomes close. Jesus makes a costly demand when He says: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). He also warns His disciples that "it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:23). Furthermore, Jesus exhorts His disciples to care for the hungry, thirsty, ill, and materially and spiritually desolate, because "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). We might respond to this call in different ways, but we must all respond to the demand Jesus places on all of His followers. Though the cost may seem great, the reward, that is Jesus Christ Himself, is infinitely greater.

Oh how divine daily life can become if we recognize poverty around us and within ourselves. We don't have to wait for our lowest moments to reach out to

God, and we don't have to wait until eternal life to encounter His love. In our poverty, we are able to give our very selves because we have nothing left to give or offer except ourselves and our hearts. After all, this is what God desires; a broken spirit and contrite heart is the sacrifice acceptable to God (cf. Ps 51:17). Though this might be the sacrifice we are called to make and the cross we are called to carry, a cross is never merely a heavy burden. It is the cause of our sanctification and the reason for the resurrection. Christ Himself is the greatest treasure and wealth we could ever possess, and we can abide evermore close to Him when we learn to become beggars of His grace.







**" Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God."**

**ST. POPE JOHN PAUL II**  
LETTER TO ARTISTS



## **ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX**

ARTIST: JOSHUA TERPSTRA

MEDIUM: DIGITAL ART, PROCREATE

ORIGINAL SIZE: 8.5" X 11"

As one of the most popular devotions of our time in the Western canon of saints, St. Thérèse's story and spirituality is well-known and her intercession is commonly sought. Her "Story of a Soul" reveals a young woman with a profound spiritual life, one who discovered an intimacy with Our Lord that was characterized by her "littleness" and youthfulness. In this short reflection, I dare not claim to properly articulate her spirituality or to give it the credit it's due - for that I refer you to her writings. But St. Thérèse is a model of the theme of "poor in spirit" in a wonderfully relatable way. In her moments of consoling spiritual experiences, of which there were many, we hear her use language that gives us hope in our own smallness. We who fall short each and every day, we who look to heaven with both feet planted in the tangle of vines of the cares of the world. I suppose this is the power of the saints: where Christ comes incarnate into our humanity and invites us into divinization, to partake in His divine nature, the saints provide us with inspiration as those who are sinful themselves. This helps in the battle.

My own understanding of St. Thérèse is probably poorer than it should be for endeavouring on this reflection. I always think of

the simplicity in her spirituality and the joy that she expresses. My understanding could probably be characterized by these quotes from her:

"When something painful or disagreeable happens to me, instead of a melancholy look, I answer by a smile" (St. Thérèse, *Story of a Soul*).

"That beautiful day passed just as the saddest ones do, since the most radiant of days has a tomorrow" (St. Thérèse, *Story of a Soul*).

General spiritual wisdom it seems, the sort of message that gives me a small hit of spiritual dopamine for the day in my prayer. Coupled with her "little way," which counsels us to live a daily and wholehearted commitment to tasks and people as a manifestation of our love for God and others (a useful application of Mt 22:37-40), it is deceptively simple and yet incredibly profound.

What captured me most, though, and indeed what was instrumental in choosing St. Thérèse as the subject of this month, was reading of her spiritual battle. This was encouraging to me. In Chapter 10, she describes the trial of faith she experienced from 1896-1897. She writes:

"Dear Mother, the image I wanted to give you of the darkness that obscures my soul is as imperfect as a sketch as it is to the model [...] may Jesus pardon me if I have caused him any pain, but he knows very well that while I do not have the *joy of faith*, I am trying to carry out its works at least [...] Also in spite of this trial which has taken away *all of my joy*, I can nevertheless cry out, "You have given me DELIGHT, O Lord, in ALL your doings" (Ps 91:5) [...] when I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE. It is true that at times a very small ray of the sun comes to illumine my darkness, and then the trial ceases for an *instant*, but afterward the memory of this ray, instead of causing me joy, makes my darkness even more dense." (St. Thérèse, *Story of a Soul*).

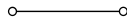
Of course, in these two years, St. Thérèse carried a heavy burden, one of great spiritual darkness, one that we would be foolish to claim as our own. What captures me in this is the *poorness of spirit* that our young saint expresses. Now, I am not saying that she was lacking in spirit, but that *the very mark of her poorness in spirit was in fact her steadfastness through spiritual darkness*. That the mark of the

saint is one who experiences great trials and suffering and the very grittiness of the Catholic life and remains remarkably steadfast. You can compile all of the spiritual wisdom together and be able to speak great words of wisdom, but I believe the moments of darkness that contrast the light are what serve as saint-making moments. That is what encourages me. It is the story of Peter asking *Quo vadis, Domine*, before turning back to Rome to embrace martyrdom at the hands of emperor Nero. It is St. Teresa of Calcutta pursuing Our Lord through her great spiritual darkness. I think this is where it counts the most, and it is in such moments we see where our heart lies, and with whom.

I am thankful to be in a place in my own spiritual life where these examples can serve as inspirations for the future, as I am rediscovering stability and joy in my own prayer life and studies. But the darkness will come, as it will for all of us, and when it does, the intercession of this great saint can give us encouragement, spurn us forward, allow us to keep fighting the good fight, and to keep pursuing the difficult path of holiness in our own spiritual poverty.



**"Poetry: the best words in the best order."**



**SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE**

# THE KING'S SUPPER

*BETHANY LAU*

Let me tell you the greatest love story of all time.  
Let me tell you of the time I encountered Love in flesh.  
Let me tell you of the time I tasted the King's Supper...

Large masses were swarming toward the city,  
Like flies around a fresh carcass, smelling blood.  
Never had I seen such a crowd.  
I was just one drop in that seething ocean of beggars.  
We had heard the royal decree,  
And had worked ourselves into a sort of frenzy,  
Incredulous of our good luck.  
Endlessly we came, clambering and shouting,  
Fighting for a better place in the line.  
We formed a pushing, shoving mass,  
That stretched out miles and miles,  
From outside the city gates,  
All the way to the king's own dining hall  
As we waited to consume what was promised us  
From the Lord's table.

We were not a pretty crowd of people.  
Hungry eyes glinted greedily at the promise of a kingly meal.  
A lifetime of cruelty and weariness etched deep into our faces,  
The wreckage of fear and pride etched deep into our hearts.  
The air was filled with the stench of our sweat and decaying flesh.  
All of us were covered in rags and filthy bandages,  
Many of us were missing hands and feet and eyes,  
A sea of worn and crippled people-  
We all bore scars from the plague that has swept across the countryside.

What fool would invite a swarm of creatures such as us  
I could not begin to fathom.  
We had nothing of use to offer for such a meal,  
Not so much as a penny or a piece of satisfactory work.  
The King had shocked the world with his invitation,  
There was no fee, no price, no trickery,  
If we only came, we would be fed royally.

I approached the great gates,  
And there stood the Master's house,  
An ivory gold tower of truth, goodness and beauty,  
A beacon of light in our diseased land.  
It looked strange and somehow vulnerable,  
With its doors thrown open, like two arms outstretched,  
As if to empty itself of its richest treasure.

As I entered the King's palace,  
I began to feel deeply ashamed.  
The brightness and beauty,  
The gold and finery that surrounded me,  
Made me feel all the more out of place.  
I was walking on sacred, forbidden ground,  
And I was certain I would spoil the master's name with my filth.  
We were nearing the table of the King.  
I began to feel afraid.  
I could not look up, so I covered my eyes.  
I could not bear to look upon his face,  
Which shone brighter than the sun.

Perhaps there was a mistake.  
He could not really have meant me.  
It was folly to come.  
It was folly to trust.  
It was folly to believe that for a moment I could be whole.  
My face burning with shame, I turned to leave.

My child," I hear a voice cry. "Where are you going?"



I turned around, but could not meet His gaze.  
“I don’t belong here.” I stammered, “I don’t deserve any of this.”  
There were hot tears in my eyes,  
And they spilled down my face, burning like acid.  
Still I dared not to look up.

“You don’t know who I am and what I’ve done.  
I have nothing left but brokenness.  
There is nothing that is not dying in me.  
There is nothing I have done worthy of praise.  
I am only a leper who has nothing left to give,  
Who desperately wants to love you,  
But does not know how.”

I was sobbing now, uncontrollably.  
I had fallen face first on the ground,  
Crushed by disgrace, certain I should not have come.

Suddenly, I felt His arms around me.  
As I had spoken, He had come down from His glorious throne  
And knelt before me in the dust,  
Embracing me in my rags, my open wounds, my disease.  
In horror, I tried to tear away,  
Terrified that I had tainted his brightness,  
Certain that when He truly saw my disfigured form,  
He would turn away in disgust.  
But He did not turn His face from me,  
But held me still, in his arms, close to his heart.  
It was only then that I dared to look in his eyes,  
And there, I saw only love.

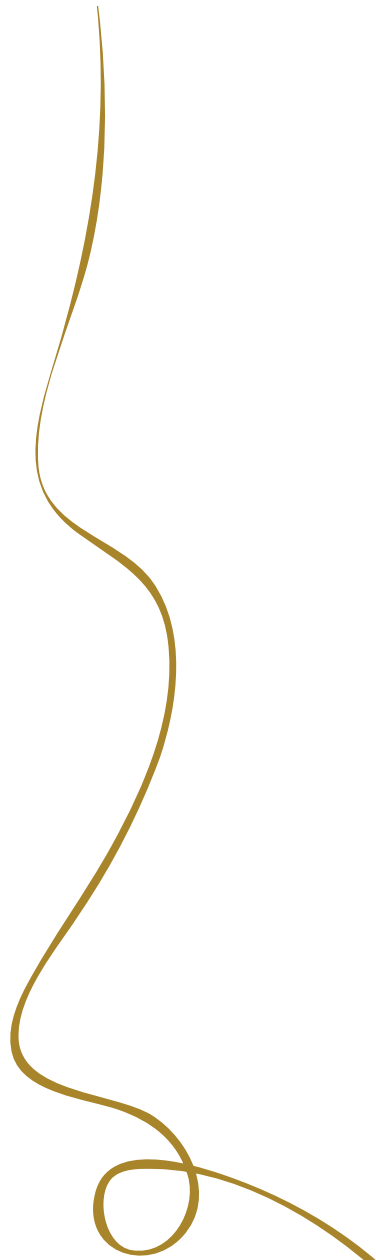
I saw a heart of mercy,  
That could embrace with tenderness,  
So many corrupt and wounded beings.  
I saw a fount of grace,  
That could heal, restore, and make all things new,  
I saw extravagant abundance,  
That could satisfy my deepest hunger.  
I saw a safe place and a refuge,  
Where I would be fully received and safely loved.  
I saw infinite gentleness and kindness  
That could fill every soul with peace.



He whispered in my ear,  
“My beloved child,  
You are enough for me.  
Give me whatever you have left,  
And I will receive it as I have received the gifts of kings.  
Give me your weaknesses,  
And I will turn them into strengths.  
Give me your failures,  
And I will make them into victories.  
Give me your pain,  
And I will make it your joy.  
Give me what is ugly in you,  
And I will transform it into heavenly beauty.  
Give me what is incomplete in you,  
And I will make you whole.  
Give me your wounds and sins,  
And you will give me the joy of being your Healer King.  
You see, my child, as you are enough for me,  
I am enough for you.  
You are beautiful to me,  
And I love you.”

He took my hand,  
His bright eyes gazing into my own  
With undeniable delight and joy,  
And He raised me up out of the dust.  
He clothed me in a robe, a ring, and sandals,  
And sat me down at his table beside him.  
He shared with me a feast of love and sacrifice,  
A feast of his infinite mercy,  
A feast of himself.

As I leaned against his heart,  
I could feel His warmth thawing my hardened one,  
His light casting out the darkness  
I could feel the fears that had ruled my life fade and melt to nothing.  
I could feel his wholeness, his oneness,  
Making new and complete every broken part of me,  
So that for a blessed eternal moment  
I was as whole and complete as he.

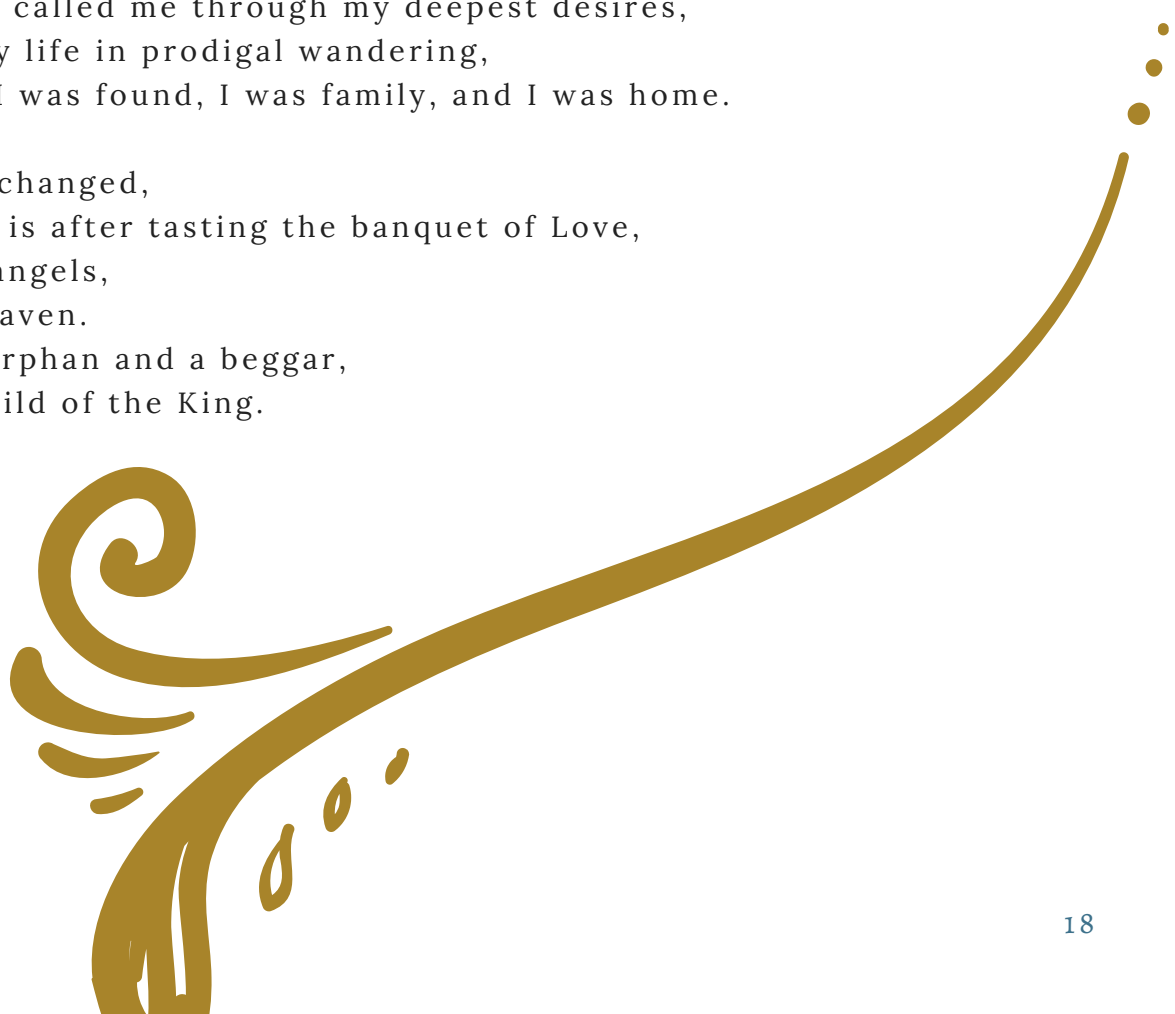


For the first time in my life,  
I rejoiced in my sickness, in my weakness, in my infirmity,  
Because it had attracted such abundant love and mercy.  
I was made all the more beautiful for having been broken,  
For His grace filled every wound, every fissure, with golden light.  
I rejoiced that I had so little to offer,  
For it meant that He, in all his beauty,  
Could fill me with more of Himself.

That blessed meal knew no time- it was and always would be.  
I was present and alive before the eternal sacrifice of love.  
And partaking in the sacrifice made me also a sacrifice.  
I was to be blessed, broken, given, transformed,  
So that in my glory-filled wounds,  
The world would find its Healer.  
Partaking in this sacrifice conformed me to His image,  
Fusing humanity with Divine Love,  
So that if any were to see me, they would see Him in me.

I could see now-  
He was the One I was looking for all of my life.  
It was He who called me through my deepest desires,  
I had spent my life in prodigal wandering,  
But that day, I was found, I was family, and I was home.

I was forever changed,  
As one always is after tasting the banquet of Love,  
The bread of angels,  
The kiss of heaven.  
I came in an orphan and a beggar,  
Came out a child of the King.



## BIOGRAPHIES

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### **Robyn Aguila**

Robyn is a joyful disciple and loves to co-create with God! She graduated from the University of Ottawa, where she fell more deeply in love with her faith and learned more about God rather than Biomedical Sciences. Currently, Robyn serves Regina Mundi Parish in the Diocese of Hamilton as the Evangelization Coordinator and is pursuing her Master of Theological Studies at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto. She is excited to see where this wonderful adventure with Christ will lead her!



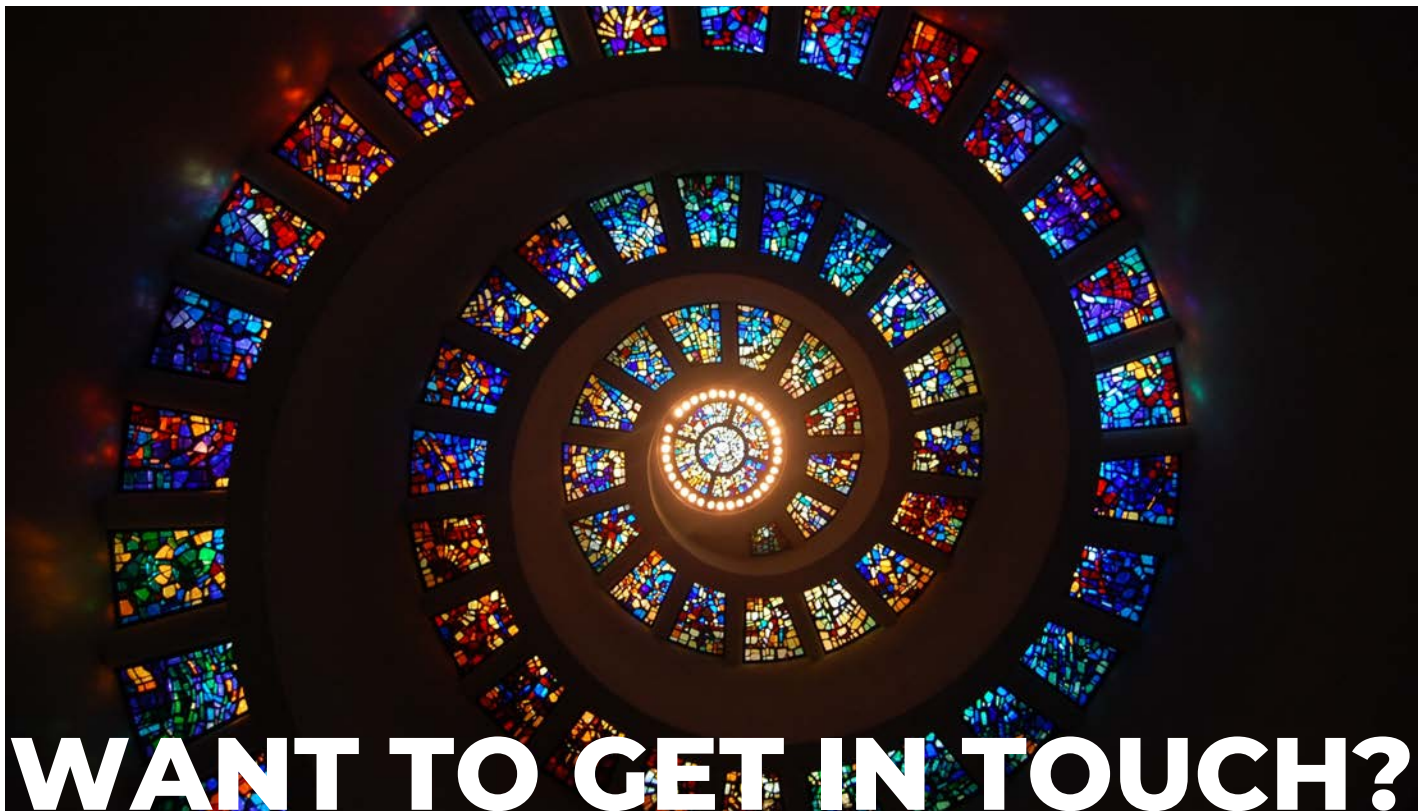
### **Bethany Lau**

Bethany a psychology student, a missionary disciple, writer, poet and jewelry designer but she receives all that she is from the gaze of Jesus. She is captured by the beauty of life, the human person, and the Trinity, and her creations are born from these moments of encounter. She is passionate about ministering to hearts and loves nothing more than a good spiritual conversation. Her dream is to raise up saints for the renewal of the world, so that everywhere Jesus would be known and loved. You can find more of her creative work on Instagram @bethany\_\_lau and @adamahdesignsbybeth



### **Joshua Terpstra**

Joshua was raised in Belleville, Ontario, where he was received by a loving Catholic community in some of his formative years. His years in youth ministry coincided with a developing love of the arts, both in the theatre and in his sketchbook. Since beginning his studies at the University of Ottawa in 2017, not only has he found a community where he has been able to thrive, he has been led to travel across the world to Singapore, Cameroon, and Mexico to serve and to learn. You can find more of his work on Instagram @arssacra\_



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