

## **White as a waterfall . . .**

The week before last while I was at a loss as to what to write for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, I found an essay I wrote around thirty years ago and decided to use that. In that old essay I referred to a beautiful poem written by Anne Porter in which she describes walking through a *Wartime Sunday* in the 1940's. Things were quiet along the East River. First Avenue was empty and gray. Shops were locked. And then she passed a window *heaped with tarnished lamps / Guitars and radios and dusty furs / And there among them a pawned christening dress / White as a waterfall.*

I went on to comment how - by such unanticipated experiences – a real world in all its holiness can break in on us – so that suddenly we realize how much we have let wars and death and worry constrict our minds. In other words: such surprise moments challenge us to explore the brilliant, perpetual NOW that lies beyond our muted senses. It elevates; it draws us out of the emptiness, grayness of our otherwise windowless world.

*And then I began to think . . . there is something wrong with that interpretation of such a moment.* I began to think of the other things in that pawnshop window: the tarnished lamps, guitars, radios, dusty furs. What about them? Is that all they are by contrast with the white christening gown? In what living room had that tarnished lamp shed light on family gatherings, or provided light by which a person might read a novel by Jane Austen. Who owned that guitar? What kind of music did it make? I still have my son Philip's electric guitar braced against a wall in our dining room – by which he relieved his tensions in ever more intricate ways – until he died at age 23. As long as I am alive nobody touches that guitar except as something holy.

And what about that radio? When I was born radios had just begun to unload music, news, games, drama into our living rooms. In the early 1920's when my father was still a teen he and other teenagers were constructing primitive radios themselves out of empty Quaker Oats boxes with wires and some primitive technology. And what about those dusty furs – once the pelts of a glossy mink or silver fox – fascinating creatures – before becoming the garb of a socialite's night at the Opera? For that matter, everything in that pawnshop could tell a story – all left overs of some human existence, indeed of some person's need to trade them for money to survive – which is a story in itself.

We elevate some moments in our life that surprise us, signal new dimensions of insight, understanding, behavior - but why just "some" moments when everything that exists, everything that happens to us speaks to us? We don't listen because of the racket of modern life – have you noticed how much gunning of engines is going on even on our side streets these days? We forget what our faith teaches, that everything in this universe issues from a Source we share. Indeed Catholic spirituality would remind us that every flower, weed, sparrow, insect, animal, cloud, star speaks to us in words or intimations as voiced by a Holy Spirit – eloquent with beauty and vitality. The universe is an ensemble of meaning, personal – if we but listen, watch, allow ourselves to be distracted . . . by a christening dress, white as a waterfall, displayed of a Sunday morning in a pawnshop window.

**Geoff Wood**