

Poetry Porch: Poetry

The Women in the Church

By Joyce Wilson

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The women there had come, like me, alone,
To sing together in between the hours
Of morning shifts and dinner preparation,
In between provided roles of mother,
Daughter, grandmother, shedding one part,
Putting on another, second skin,
Student, speaker, leader, unemployed.
gesticulations outside, dreams inside;
Identities at best, or else a mask.

One worshiper got up and joined me as
We stood to pray with all the others there.
She led me through responses with one arm
Linked through my arm, the other pointing to
The verse that said I'd be forgiven of
My trespasses if I'd forgive them theirs.
Her grip assured me she was merciful.
Her gaze through scrutinizing spectacles
Was not so sure. I lost my train of thought.

That she believed in me, though she could not
Have known how I had come or who I was,
Raised up uncertainty I'd kept at bay,
Walking, searching for a thing to do.
These women all engage themselves in tasks
That make them useful in the churchly things—
With flowers, cleaning, singing, ordering,
Withdrawing when official burghers come—
But I among them was a visitor,

A guest, not worthy to be there. I saw
A stronger mercy, shouldered in good will
That held these ancient offices in place,
These dovetailed beams, the passages of time.
At service end, I'll be released, outside,
To walk where hapless women can be stoned
Amid the noise of city crowds, the cars,
The taxis loitering, the screeching tires,
The horns and lights, the blinking on and off.