

When You Are Pope



Mike Finley 1

When you are pope you can not be like other men.
You cannot be seen disappearing into limos
outside casinos or polishing off a beer at a corner tavern,
the old men snorting at your caftan and cap.
You cannot affect a commanding air,
pulling at your cincture and laughing like a man,
you must be humble all the day,
you must be unworthy to loosen the bootstraps of the world,
even if you are not feeling humble, or humble has become
tiresome as a singsong prayer.
Everyone is your boss because everyone knows you
and expects certain behavior.
No spitting, no grumpiness, no annoyance with fools
for if you show any signs of being human
they will not let you be pope any more
and you will wind up on a bridge somewhere

selling windup toys or grilled kebabs and people will come up to you
squinting

saying I know you.

You must always be for life and always be for peace

and never concede the fact that everybody dies and the world is ripe
with people

who could benefit richly from a ferocious beating

and everyone knows it but you are not allowed to say it.

People go one and on about this saint and that saint

and you can say nothing though you know all the evidence in all their
files,

who was too fond of the muscatel, who wrote letters of an unholy
nature,

who masturbated with the lilies of the field, and who,

when the dog the body was disinterred and the coffin cracked

the look on their face was a maniac grin, frozen that way

for eternity.

It is hard to keep up with friends.

It is just not the same once you are pope.

They are so fond of you now, fonder than they ever were of you before

and nothing you say gets through to them,

they won't let you be honest any more.

There are times you want to burst out crying and tell them everything

what a crock the Vatican is and what assholes the cardinals all are

and what you would give just to sit and play cards and sip gin

like you used to years ago before people stopped listening.

When you are pope you understand your career

has probably peaked,
there will probably not be many achievements after this,
it will be unusual even to catch a fish
on a Saturday in an aluminum boat, the little waves banging against
the prow, and haul it flipping
into your net. You will look over your shoulder and the lake will be full
of other boats, and film crews and helicopters, and people will say it's
not a fish,
it's an allegory, you have to think about this on a very complex level,
nothing is simple any more.

When you are pope it is sadder than you imagined.

The devout and the suffering look to you as if you had the answers
for their madness, for the cough that has been getting worse,
for the world in arms, and the torture of the faithful over slow flames,
and you would do anything to take away the pain
but what can you do, you are only a pope.

Your faith that never let you down before
is suspect, you haven't heard from God in years,
he is like some clever zephyr that blows into town and blows out again,
now you see him, then for thousands of years you don't,
and if gets to be too much and you start to doubt it's your fault,
where's your faith you sad son of a bitch, I was just waiting
for this moment, I knew you would disappoint me.

And now the light pours in at Castle Gandolfo, and you awaken late
and your kidneys ache and you wonder how long you can carry the
cross

for the rest of the world, and you think of a girl
you knew in school, and you wonder what became of her,
if she got old and fat and lost that look that lifted you up off your feet
all those years ago or she is still who she was, only better,
a lifetime later, and all this time she could have been your friend,
and you turn in the bedsheets, holding your side,
you feel as if a spear that fetched water from you,
and it is seeping away like raindrops from the body,
shiny as silver, as famous as dust.

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