

Not like this, O Judge of All.  
Not like this.

This is not the way I would write  
the story's end for one I love—  
cut down by an intentional act  
of unnecessary violence.

So senseless.  
So brutal.  
So random and surreal.

It is a crime, a loss, a shock, an evil,  
and a tragedy all in one for their life  
to be cut short like this, to have to  
grieve a death that did not have to be,  
the taking of this life in clear violation  
of your good commandment.

O Christ, where is the justice that could  
ever make this right, when no one can  
restore what has been taken?

My life will not continue as before.  
I cannot be so happy or carefree.  
This loss, and the manner of this loss,  
is like a caustic fog, permeating everything.

THE PETITIONER SHOULD INCLUDE ANY OF  
THE FOLLOWING FOUR PARAGRAPHS THAT REFLECT  
THEIR EXPERIENCE.

My sense of the world I inhabit has changed,  
twisted by this act. I navigate my days with  
heightened dread. My thoughts are more  
disorganized. Forebodings and suspicions  
crowd my head. I feel so powerless, so often angry,  
disquieted, distrustful of strangers, without peace.

A LITURGY FOR

## Grieving a Death Due to Violence

FROM THE BOOK  
*EVERY MOMENT HOLY,*  
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& *HOPE*  
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DOUGLAS MCKELVEY

II

I cannot quiet these obsessive thoughts of my loved one's final moments. In my mind the scene plays out again and again, either as it was, or as it might have been.

III

I hide away, increasing my isolation. Even in a crowd, I feel alone—as if my close proximity to violent death has marked me with a stigma anyone can see. People treat me differently. They either tread too lightly, or they stomp.

IV

Now I find myself avoiding people and places that I cannot bear to face, for they remind me too much of what I lost, and what I've come to fear—I fear that harm might come to others that I love. I fear that harm might come to me. There is no way to guarantee our safety when our loss is built of someone else's choice. I cannot guard against all selfish acts that anyone at any time might take. I can't control the variables of life to guarantee that tragedy will never strike again.

I surely cannot change what happened.

Or make sense of it.

Or find some lesson in it.

Or force the wheels of justice

to spin to a satisfying end.

And so I am left feeling vulnerable,  
and violated, and helpless.

Be my refuge and my shelter, O Lord.  
Be my shield and defender. Hold me in  
this hour; hold me through this long,  
dark night when death's shadow obstructs  
the light; cradle and carry me through  
this vale of sorrows; deliver me to higher  
ground. Let justice roll down, O Christ.

Lift my head that I might see new evidence of your mercies in my life. I am too weak to walk this path alone, or to power through by force of my own will.

I know, O God, that you would have me be completely honest in my words to you, voicing even these discouragements and volatile emotions. And you are more than able to bear their weight, never wavering in your constant love and care for me.

For you, O God, watched one you love die violently—your only son. You sympathize with me. So I will freely speak to you the depths of what I feel.

IF ONE STRUGGLES WITH AN OVERWHELMING ANGER TOWARD THE ONE RESPONSIBLE, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Sometimes I feel such rage, O Lord, against the one who took a life. I know it is a natural response. I cannot, by a simple choice, quench the fire of what I feel.

But in my heart I also know that there will be no freedom in the fanning of those flames of rage. I will not deny the anger that I feel today, but I do not want to feed a fire that would in time consume me with bitterness. I would be honest in my pain, but not become the walking sum of all my pain.

Now let me come to you, uncovering these wounds as often as I need, and learning how to offer them to you, that you might minister your grace to me.

THE PETITIONER MAY TAKE TIME HERE TO UNBURDEN THEIR HEART TO GOD,  
AND AFTERWARD TO SIT QUIETLY AND EXPECTANTLY IN HIS PRESENCE.

Now shape me, Lord, even through this ache  
and sorrow, into one who does not let my  
pain harden into hate, but who instead is made  
more tender over time.

Convince me of your promise that my loss will  
be eternally restored, and so let me, in time, grow  
still more fearless in my love, O Christ.

Vengeance and justice are in your hands, not mine,  
and even when our human systems get it wrong,  
still your eternal judgements will be right.  
So do not let the darkness of this world  
overshadow the light of your love in me.

Now make your redeeming mercies  
manifest, O Christ. Take this great evil  
and by the unseen movements of your Spirit  
subvert that act of violence, shaping as  
a playwright crafts a scene, taking one  
character's ill intent and weaving even  
that back into a grander narrative display  
of beauty, grace, and restoration.

O Holy Spirit, hover now over the chaos of  
this broken world,  
this broken situation,  
and my broken heart,  
and from them call forth new mercies  
and new hope:

From fields seeded with mortal sorrows,  
let me one day reap a harvest of immortal joys.  
From this stony soil of human hatreds,  
let fountains of divine love burst forth,  
let streams of gladness run and pool,  
let shoots of verdant mercy root and bloom.  
Over all this dark and weary land,

let your eternal glories rise, radiant as  
a dawning sun dispelling a black  
and tragic night.

From this very heart of death, O God,  
call forth new and everlasting life.

Amen.