

SESTINA FOR MIRACLE- SEEKERS

Mary Lou Cornish on Overcoming False
Piety

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Hearing that Benedict of Nursia (480-547) miraculously returned a shattered earthenware pot to its original pristine condition, people came from afar for his healing touch. So shaken was he by the crowds, he fled to a cave at Subiaco. A fellow monk lowered food and water to him every few days. He did not leave the cave for three years.

Heal-me-begging miracle-seekers
chased him from normal piety
to a ten-foot-deep hole in the ground, his home
for three years, an entombment both spiritual
and physical, chosen because he longed
to be alone with the Lord, desperate

for unbroken communion with him, desperate
to be holy, while the self-centered miracle-seekers
thought only of their make-me-well wants and longed,
sadly, for the unnecessary. Their piety
being superficial, they put their bodies before the
spiritual,
thinking the earthly tent an all-important home.

But the body is only a temporary home
for the soul. Would these people ever become desperate
for God instead of their healing? Would the spiritual
ever conquer the flesh? Can miracle-seekers
grasp that relationship unmasks sick piety,
piety that binds and misleads? I have longed

myself for a body free of pain, and longed
for physical comfort more than for God. At home
with grumbling and sorrow, I lived full of rage, not piety
(even piety of a poor sort), just crying me, me, me.

Desperate
for a pool-of-Bethesda healing, I joined the miracle-
seekers
in their blind desire. To focus me on the spiritual,

God put me in a cave of suffering. Spiritual
growth demands hardship and solitude. I longed
for release, but did not want to be just another miracle-
seeker,
seeking my will, not God's. I realized my true home
is in heaven, not in this crumbling cage. Now desperate
for the three-personed God, I discovered true piety

rests on Christ, the person, not on what I want from him.

True piety
fountains forth from the spiritual
waters of the Living Word. No longer desperate
to make God obey me, I only longed
for intimacy with him, his Spirit at home
in me, no more just a do-what-I-say miracle-seeker.

I encourage you, miracle-seekers, be at home

in flesh that wastes, long only for the spiritual,
abandon false piety, and for Christ alone, be desperate.