

## Fourth of March, 2018

for Francis Xavier McCarthy

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Timothy Murphy

### I

Thirteen years back this very day I bent  
 Before the Trinity,  
 Decades of heresy  
 And all my modest fortune wildly spent.

Hitting bottom I thought it at the time,  
 Confused, depressed and lost.  
 Ten weeks from Pentecost  
 The Holy Spirit spun me like a dime

And snatched me from the grasp of suicide.  
 He marched me up a path  
 Leading from drunken wrath  
 To the clear Great Plains air where I abide,

Trying to craft a Christian way to live,  
 Murphy the first sinner I must forgive.

### II

I know firsthand it's a hard hill to climb.  
 Now I approach its end,  
 Way too early, friend.  
 Cancer catches me running out of time,

A final lesson in humility,  
 In long-suffering pain  
 Washing life down the drain.  
*Fishers of men* have their nobility

I wish I'd studied more than these few years,  
 Sts. Matthew, Luke and John,  
 St. Mark, his stories drawn  
 Sitting at Peter's feet, the Roman spears

Ranked around Christ and cross at Calvary:  
*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani.*

### III

Benedict sent a vision, and you called,  
 The saint and not our Pope  
 Emeritus, a rope  
 Of elpis grasped on which our Savior hauled.

You claimed "Jesus loves drunks and faggots  
 too,"

And I laid by my gun.  
 The early springtime sun  
 Streamed through my glass wall with its  
 river view.

Francis, we'd fallen silent thirty years.  
 Thank God you tracked me down,  
 Thank God you talked me down,  
 For that day death was least among my fears,

I, who hadn't the least clue how to pray.  
 Had you not called I couldn't write today.

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**Timothy Murphy**, onetime Yale University Scholar of the House in Poetry, farmed and hunted in the Dakotas, and wrote seven books, including *Set the Ploughshare Deep: A Prairie Memoir*, before his death from cancer in June 2018.