

Readings for the Requiem for the Victims of AIDS

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"GENESIS AND REVELATION"

(Precedes i. Lesson)

1 In the beginning, God created both the heavens and the earth. 2 And God let there be light, with dawning day and dying night. 3 And he bade the earth bring forth, and the earth brought forth multitudes of life, with creatures weak and strong, those to consume and those to be consumed. 4 And God saw all that he had made, and declared it good. 5 And unto man He gave the joys of life to taste. And the Lord God said: 'It is not good that man should be alone.' 6 And he made man to share the earth, and declared that this was good. 7 Now, the virus was more subtle than any serpent which the Lord had made; and it said unto man: 'God has made the joys of life for you to taste; O taste and see how bitter that joy is.' And it put forth its seed without the knowledge of good and evil. 8 And the eyes of man were opened wide, and man trembled naked and afraid in its presence. 9 And the virus, which was made by God, called unto man, saying: 'Where are those who fear me?' And man grieved at the sound of its voice. 10 And, unto man, the virus said: 'I shall greatly increase your pain, and your joys shall be accurséd, and you shall return before your time unto the ground, for dust thou art.' 11 And the virus was placed at the center of life, as a flaming sword, which turns each way, to destroy by the blood of its hands. 12 And man saw what God had made, and grew perplexed, and could not declare that it was good. 13 But, behold, it repented the Lord that He had fashioned the virus in His power, and it grieved Him at His heart. 14 This is the book of the generations of man. In the day that God had created the virus in man, one lived forty-seven years in quiet and hidden joy; and he died. 15 And one lived thirty-eight years, and begot daughters and sons; and she died too soon. One lived to celebrate life in music and dance; and he died. 16 And one lived twenty-three years, a virgin saint; and she died. One lived but eighteen years; and, like the candle in the wind, he died. One lived seven short years with no stain of shame or sin; and he died. 17 One lived days less than a year; and she died. 18 But, it shall come to pass, that God will move the hearts of man towards the wisdom of love and the compassion for pain, that, by this, would man find grace in the sight of God, and God, grace in the sight of man. 19 Therefore are we commanded by the grace of compassion to help and heal each victim, to better see the face of God, and renew the heavens and the earth, our beginning and our end.

"H. I. V."

(Precedes iii. Sequence)

H. I. V.

Pronounce these letter slowly

To savor their import.

H. I. V.

The "H" is for the "human,"

The "I" for "immunodeficiency,"

The "V" - that vicious "V" stands for the virus

Which comes for you and me.

For, given its own time and circumstance,

The single prick, the impetuous penetration,

The transfusion's sweetly gentle kiss,

This comes then this - the virus.

Poor, sad HIV has no life to call its own.

It takes no food and makes no waste;

It has no sex, for it is chaste.

Small, angry HIV is but a protein capsule

Of incomplete genetic strands

And enzymes for its sense and hands.

In its meek and mean simplicity,

It is simply unforgiving

And, without pity, walks and stalks the living.

And it waits.

It waits for us to fall,

To blunder blindly

Into unforeseen time and circumstance

When we are

hungry for lust,

thirsting for love,

fleeing from the pain,

and hiding from the hurt,

groping for relief

from hidden torments,

running away

or running to.

And there it waits,

Lying in our bed,

Working on our street,

Lurking in our embrace,

Burning in our vein,

Coming and coming,

Pouring over on into us.

It has come before.

The "H" is for each "human,"

The "I" for "immunodeficiency,"

The "V" - the "V" abbreviates its "victim,"

someone else,

or you or me.

"HE SAID, SHE SAID"

(Precedes iv. Vigil)

He said, "All I can feel is the rage, and think of the waste of it all."

And she said, "I was married. I never thought AIDS would affect me in a million years. I never knew."

He said, "Almost everyone I've met since the epidemic began is dead."

And she said, "It was the street, with all those needles being passed around."

He said, "It was a living hell."

And she said, "My father couldn't look at me without crying."

He said, "Oh sweetie, will you forgive me this."

And she said, "My family won't have anything to do with me. I rely on God."

That is what he said.

That is what she said.

He said, "I helped him the best I could just by being there."

And she said, "I was his lifeline, and that lifeline was tied around my neck, tugging and tugging and tugging."

He said, "They've given me more than I could ever return. Such strength, such dignity and such decency."

And she said, "Who do I blame? Myself? I sure don't."

He said, "Unlike the others with AIDS who are shunned, there was a network of people who were there."

And she said, "I picked him up and wrapped him in his blanket, and kissed him goodbye."

That is what he said.

That is what she said.

Some have died. Some live on.

Amen.

"FORGIVING UNFORGIVING GOD"

(Precedes vii. Libera me)

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away;
Blessed be the name of confusion -
The giving and the taking away.

Forgiving unforgiving God -
Were we in anger able
To call You down and to entreat
To answer here and now
Before our judgment seat.

Forgiving unforgiving God -
From virus-centered man
Accept an angry, sullen prayer,

Its roots in rage and fury,
Its blossoms of despair.

Forgiving unforgiving God -
We pray with the unanswered
Unanswerable question: Why?
Why must joy give way to sorrow?
Why must love be made to die?

Too soon.
Too soon.
Too soon.

If love is all that life can be,
If love is truly real,
Teach us the greater love to know,
To mourn, to act, to heal.

Forgiving unforgiving God -
We pray our meditations,
Our doubts, our grief, our debt;
We offer up the loves and lives
We cannot, will not forget.

O forgiving unforgiving God -
We demand to be more able
To deeper understand our lives,
And, better yet, to find
Some healing warmth of love survives
Of love, lost love,
And love to come.

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord's
Giving and taking away.