

The Grilled Saint

by Bill Yarrow

I celebrate Saint Lawrence
who was broiled on a gridiron
and whose seaway is impressive.
He is the patron saint of curriers
those who dress, finish and color leather
to make it strong, flexible waterproof, and pretty.
For conspiring to hide Church documents, librarians also claim him.
When asked to turn over the Church's riches
he brought before the Roman prefect the poor, blind, ragged and
infirm.
These, he said, *are the true treasures of the Church*
at which point they seized him and placed him atop burning coals.

After some time he is reputed to have remarked,
Turn me over. I'm done on this side.
Thus he is claimed not only by cooks and chefs
but also by comedians.

But was he really that droll as he was being burned alive?

The Reverend Patrick Joseph Healy argues
this was all the result of an innocuous error
the unwitting omission of the letter p
by which the solemn formula
for announcing the death of a martyr
—*passus est*—
was made to read *assus est*
passus est meaning he suffered
assus est meaning he was roasted

That's how the disparaging proverb
he's as lazy as Lawrence

got started and spread across the centuries
for that was what his tormentors said about the martyr
as he lay supine on the burning grill
a man apathetic and listless
too indolent, they thought, even to wriggle.

