

Confessions of a Liturgical Voyeur

by Angela Kubinec

January, Epiphany

Third pew on the right, every Sunday. He genuflects beautifully, while she sways a little with her songbook, held closely to her breasts when the familiar words of the refrain are sung. I know all this because I watch. I don't pray, sing, or recite, but I do observe the ways people shift from week to week, in the distances between them, the tilts of their heads. Who stiffens at which point in the homily. Who drags up from the kneeler last.

February, Ash Wednesday — Beginning of Lent

Over the last few years, her hair has become less and less blonde, less fluid, shorter. The men in our parish seem to be on boycott over this change in style. I don't see small groups of them, pretending to greet one another, clustered around her so much anymore. She got thin all of a sudden, like something happened and her life was startled. I was attracted to her like the men were, when there was something solid about her curves, something that would not yield. After mass today, when I walk past, it feels as if something that cannot yield is holding her together. Would not and cannot — so much the same and yet so different.

April, Maundy Thursday

I noticed a few weeks ago a little scar from a recent incision on her throat, but when she spoke, her voice still seemed to spill bourbon from a heavy crystal tumbler, and drift cigarette smoke in a dark paneled room. It was impossible for me to say how relieved and happy I was to hear that incredible husky sound still rising from her. I don't know who to ask about that scar.

July, Memorial of Mary Magdalene

We have a mutual acquaintance who claims that she and her husband make blatant sexual jokes in mixed company, and cause

their own money problems. Those traits do not endear her to me, but at the end of mass, there the two of them are, helping a fellow parishioner from his wheelchair to their car, and on to his apartment, where she will see to it that he is properly fed before leaving.

May, Optional memorial of Joseph the Worker

She is the only woman I know who can wear a bold floral dress and boots, but today she is plain. Her husband has taken to draping his arm across the back of the pew, a bare brown bumper protecting her in its short plaid sleeve. There was a time when they sat more closely side by side, and I like to imagine she irritated him a bit by playing with his fingers during the readings.

September, Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

Suddenly, she twinkles up there, near the front. Her head is lifted, turned toward her husband's ear, and although he is obviously praying, she is talking. She continues to talk as if they are in a spiritual automobile that he is driving with his undivided attention, and she is bored with the only radio station available on their journey. Although he makes no movement toward her, and gives no indication of hearing her as he kneels, she continues anyway. I cannot hear her, but I believe I like whatever it is that she is saying.

