

Summer Prose & Poetry Recitation

For each season of the year we try to commit some verse or a prose selection to memory. There is no better way to relish the beauty and power of our native tongue or reflect with delight on the truth that makes us free.

Past selections have included David Middleton's "Of Magnanimity," Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter," a letter of counsel from Thomas Jefferson to a young lad, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, both "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" and "To a Young Lady" by William Cowper, "To the Reverend Sister Marianne" by Robert Louis Stevenson, and last season's "Holy Sonnet XIV" by John Donne.

For the summer months, let's simply rehearse what we've already committed to memory; polish things up a bit so to speak. For that purpose, Donne's sonnet is repeated below; we trust students will recall or be able to retrieve earlier selections.

Holy Sonnet XIV John Donne

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you
As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But I am bethroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Even after almost three millennia of written literature, poetry retains its appeal to the ear as well as to the eye; to hear a poem read aloud by someone who understands it, and who wishes to share that understanding with someone else, can be a crucial experience, instructing the silently reading eye ever thereafter to hear what it is seeing.

(John Hollander, ed.; *Committed to Memory: 100 Best Poems to Memorize*; p. 1)