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Inauguration

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Inauguration
A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul
Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,
The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre
For the inauguration of Mark Heckler as President of Valparaiso University
In the Chapel of the Resurrection
First performance, October 17, 2008

I. Inauguration

Joe:

What's all this?

Cathy:

This is the inauguration.

Carol:

So what is an inauguration?

Jim:

All *this*.

Carol:

But what does the word mean?

Jack:

Haven't got a clue.

Joe:

(points at Jack as if introducing him) Clueless!

Jim:

Must mean, something like, first.

Joe:

The *first* time President Heckler makes a speech to the faculty and students.

Carol:

But it's not... the first. That was at the Opening Convocation. So what does *inauguration* mean?

Cathy:

Let's take the word apart.

Joe:

OK, we're *in here* for a start.

Jack:

Where?

Cathy:

The Chapel of the Resurrection.

Jim:

Dedicated in 1959.

Carol:

(points to Jim as if introducing him) The historian.

Joe:

And, *-ation* makes a verb into a noun. I remember that from Latin.

Jim:

Another Cicero!

Carol:

But what about *augur*?

Cathy:

I used that in a crossword puzzle yesterday. *Augurs*, actually.

Carol:

What was the clue?

Cathy:

Bodes.

Jack:

What does *bodes* mean?

Jim:

Later... sing now.¹

II. Augury

Jack:

In-

Cathy:

-augur-

Joe:

-ation.

Carol:

Augur?

Cathy:

Augury.

Connie:

Augurer.

Jack:

You mean *arguer*?

¹ *Between sections of the play, hymns were sung by the players and congregation.*

Cathy:

No, augurer.

Joe:

It's *augur*, actually, and here's the definition from the Oxford English Dictionary. "A religious official among the Romans, whose duty it was to predict future events and advice upon the course of public business in accordance with omens derived from the flight, singing, and feeding of birds..."

Cathy:

Flight.

Jim:

Singing.

Jack:

Feeding.

Carol:

Of birds!

Connie:

I'm like that.

Jack:

A bird lover?

Connie:

A prophet.

Jim:

According to Aeschylus, the circling of twin eagles over Mycenae inaugurated the Trojan War.

Carol:

I remember in high school we read *Julius Caesar* and he met a soothsayer on the way to the Senate.

Jim:

Turned out to be Caesar's last day right?

Carol:

The soothsayer warned him not to go out in the Ides of March.

Jack:

How'd he know?

Connie:

Augury. Signs from birds.

Joe:

So an in-AUGUR-atino is for the birds then?

Jack:

What'd I tell ya?

Carol:

From the birds, Dr. Dictionary.

“To inaugurate is to take omens from the flight of birds, to consecrate or install after taking such omens and auguries.”

Jim:

Like when Noah sent a bird out to find dry land. A raven, I think.

Connie:

And the bird came back wet!

Carol:

But then Noah sent out a dove.

Cathy:

And the dove came back with an olive branch in its beak.

Jack:

And then Noah knew it was everybody out. Finally. Time to start up the world again.

Joe:

I wonder what the birds would tell us today.

Jack:

So, Briana... you're a prophet! What will happen next?

Connie:

More singing.

Jim:

(he sees it) And the entrance of a cross.

III. Procession

Joe:

In-

Cathy:

-augur-

Jim:

-ation.

Connie:

Augur.

Carol:

To take omens from the flight of birds.

Cathy:

Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul

Joe:

Nice. Yours?

Cathy:

Emily Dickinson's.

Carol:

Here come the professors.

Jack:

Their scarves make them look like birds.

Jim:

Walking birds.

Joe:

Those “scarves” are called “hoods.”

Jim:

Each color for a different major.

Joe:

They’re called “disciplines.”

Jack:

(Points to him as if to introduce him) The Expert!

Cathy:

Look, there’s a cardinal.

Joe:

A purple finch.

Carol:

A goldfinch.

Jim:

A mourning dove.

Connie:

An oriole.

Jack:

Lots and lots of red-winged blackbirds.

Cathy:

All those black gowns.

Joe:

Lots of doctorates!

Carol:

Why so many blue birds?

Cathy:

Lots of Doctors of Philosophy.

Jim:

An egret.

Jack:

A woodpecker.

Cathy:

A hoopoe.

Joe:

A flamingo.

Carol:

A swallow.

Connie:

A hawk.

Jim:

An owl.

Cathy:

So much wisdom.

Jack:

A parrot.

Joe:

So many colors.

Carol:

A peacock.

Connie:

So much plumage.

Jim:

A robin.

Cathy:

Soaring birds.

Carol:

These birds will help *us* soar.

Joe:

These birds augur well.

Jim:

Good signs. For soaring. Indeed.

IV. Inauguration

Joe:

In-

Carol:

-augur-

Jim:

-ation.

Connie:

Augur.

Jack:

Augurs.

Cathy:

Augury.

Connie:

A good day for soaring say the signs.

Carol:

Soaring? Where?

Cathy:

To the clouds.

Jim:

To the cloud. The great cloud of witnesses.

Jack:

Hey wait! I'm not ready for that yet.

Carol:

I'm glad to be here. As a witness.

Jim:

Under that cloud. In this place.

Joe:

Under these witnesses.

Cathy:

And with these witnesses; these bird witnesses.

Jim:

And there are others. Hundreds.

Connie:

Thousands. Not just here. Outside. Along the "live stream."²

Cathy:

And, in the cloud, the great cloud of witnesses.

Jack:

Who's up there?

² *The inauguration was shown on the internet by live stream.*

Joe:

Saints...

Carol:

... and angels...

Jim:

... and presidents.

Cathy:

Their names are...

Jim:

Francis D. Carley and Charles N. Sims

Jack:

Erastus Herman Staley and B. Wilson Smith

Carol:

Thomas Bond Wood and Aaron Gurney

Connie:

Henry Baker Brown and Oliver Perry Kinsey

Cathy:

Henry Kinsey Brown and Daniel Russell Hodgdon

Joe:

John Edward Roessler and Milo Jesse Bowman

Jack:

... and Horace Martin Evans.

Jim:

Then came the Lutherans:

Carol:

William Henry Theodore Dau

Connie:

Albert Frederick Ottomar Germann

Cathy:

John C. Baur

Joe:

John C. Baur, Albert Frank Scribner, Frederick William Kroencke, and Henry Herman Kumnick.

Jack:

All at once?

Cathy:

A flock!

Jim:

Oscar Carl Kreinheder

Joe:

Walter George Friedrich

Jack:

Otto Paul Kretzmann

Carol:

Albert G. Huegli

Jim:

And soaring still:

Connie:

Robert V. Schnabel

Cathy:

And Alan F. Harre

Jim:

And the 18th president of Valparaiso University: Mark Alan Heckler.

Jack:

And that's what this inauguration is all about, right?

All:

Right!

V. Birds in the Windows

Joe:

As the Psalm says, "the days of our life are seventy years,

Carol:

Or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;

Jim:

Even then their span is only toil and trouble;

Cathy:

They are soon gone and we fly away."

Connie:

We fly away.

Jack:

And stay.

Joe:

We soar away.

Jack:

But stay... like that little flock of birds, in the window, soaring away from God's hands.

Joe:

Where is it?

Carol:

Where are they?

Jack:

In the windows.³

Connie:

Birds in the windows.

Jim:

There! Way above that rooster crowing on the steeple top. See it?

Jack:

There.

Carol:

And at the very top a dove like Noah's dove.

Joe:

With an olive branch in its mouth.

Cathy:

For peace...

Carol:

And the promise of home.

Jim:

In the center there's a phoenix, a symbol of the resurrected Christ.

Connie:

Over on the right there's an owl.

Jack:

Way up on the right. It's –

Cathy:

It's another dove.

Carol:

Where?

³ Behind the altar of the Chapel of the Resurrection stands the Munderloh Windows, 98 feet of stained glass representing biblical stories and various images, among which are many birds.

Jack:

Way up on the right. See? It's –

Cathy:

It's the Dove of the Holy Spirit.

Carol:

How do you know?

Joe:

See the Pentecost flames surrounding it?

Cathy:

Windows full of birds.

Carol:

Why?

Connie:

They're signs of things to come.

Joe:

They augur well?

Connie:

They augur *well*.

Jack:

They're soaring...

Cathy:

We're soaring.

Connie:

And they'll be here, in those windows, when we're home!

END