

Take Up Your Cross - *Dylan Fisk*

With this new quill, I tell of second birth,

A lifelong pilgrimage on hallowed earth,

In which I strive to my Creator reach

Yet not in splendor, but in heart and speech.

⁵ I first appeal to Spirit held inside:

O Holy Spirit, cast away my pride!

And if it be Thy will for which You've planned,

Please animate these fingers, guide this hand,

So through each word, Your love will be in view,

¹⁰ And glory will be found in none but You.

O Lord above, the perfect trinity,

The Father, Son, and Spirit, one yet three,

Please sanctify me through the words I write,

As I recount my journey towards Your light,

¹⁵ My striving for the Son, the bread of life,

Who guides me through the world and all its strife.

And though this tale may yet be incomplete,

The rest we'll form together, Paraclete!

Now here, amidst the forest white from cloud,

²⁰ My life uncovered from its worldly shroud,

My tale begins:

Yes, prior, I had lived, but it was death;
A dead-man walking, without sight or breath.
Content was I without a single sense,
²⁵ Much blinded to my need for recompense.
Yet our great Lord, in goodness and in grace,
Had no intent to leave me in that space,
And brought me out of darkness into sun;
At once, restored my life and called me “son”.
³⁰ His gentle hands then placed me in this glade,
It’s here it all began, where I was laid.

When I awoke, it felt as though I’d dreamed
Of all those years which real to me had seemed.
Yet something deep inside stirred me to wake,
³⁵ To leave behind those dreams and thus forsake
The world I’d known before, and thence arise;
Discover this new world with virgin eyes.
Alone I stood then, in that forest glade,
In awe of everything that He had made:
⁴⁰ The trees, the clouds that kept the air so cool,
The dirt that marked the paths of wise and fool.
Then, as I looked around at nature lush,
Something had caught my eye beside the brush.

It seemed to be a cross of fine-carved wood,

⁴⁵ Yet I knew not for what reason it stood.

So as I walked, I drew close to observe,

To see, perhaps, what purpose it could serve.

The search was fruitless, much to my dismay,

But then I heard a noise from down the way.

⁵⁰ Behold! there stood a Man with shepherd's staff

Who called to me from someplace on the path.

My ears were opened to receive His voice,

And in His Word, I was given this choice:

“If your wish is to come and follow me,

⁵⁵ Take up that cross and walk my path daily.”

With what great power was His heartfelt call!

Yet as for miracles, that was not all:

I looked upon His face and saw it glow,

And in that shimmer, knew to Him I'd go,

⁶⁰ For who as man could shine ethereal,

But one who, too, is all empyreal?

So in my heart, I knew where lied my fate:

To follow Him with cross through narrow gate.

Though looking at the cross, I grieved the charge,

⁶⁵ For it stood tall and hefty, much too large

To carry as a burden and a yoke...

My confidence and spirit this thought broke.

Yet looking back at Him who beckoned me,

I recognized that He had set me free.

⁷⁰ And so, I'd have to overcome this pain

For Him who gave me life—in Him was gain.

With this new hope in hand, the cross I took,

And underneath its weight, my weak arms shook,

Yet still, I looked to where my Savior stood,

⁷⁵ And knew, with faith, that He would make it good.

Imbued with confidence and my Lord's strength,

I began wayward trek, feared not the length,

For in pursuit of Him whom my heart yearned,

I would, to my Creator, be returned.

⁸⁰ The start was slow, each step itself a test,

On rocky road where bare feet felt no rest,

Through forest dense that did eternal seem,

And led my conscience to corrupted dream:

How great to leave the cross and drop its weight,

⁸⁵ And drift in comfort through the wider gate!

Yet my heart knew the folly of this thought:

Though promised ease, with darkness was it fraught.

Thus, at the fork between narrow and wide,

My steps aligned me with my blessed Guide,
⁹⁰ For though my burden now was surely great,
I knew true life was found through narrow gate.

With foot in front of foot, I made my way,
To beyond forest's edge by end of day,
Where I caught up to Him paused on the road,
⁹⁵ And, once in sight, He bid my arms unload
With smile bright, glad to my weight relieve,
And joyful that, in Him, I'd still believe.
A fire we prepared within the field,
Its flame and light the perfect warmth and shield,
¹⁰⁰ Though truly what defenses would I need
When trusting in this Man so fit to lead?
A shepherd, yes, too was He wise to teach:
In parables of nature was His speech,
And pointing out the woods along our route,
¹⁰⁵ He said to me, "Each tree is as its fruit:
The good tree must, by nature, good fruit bear,
While every bad tree sows and reaps despair.
We recognize a man by what he's done,
So emulate the actions of the Son."
¹¹⁰ How profound was His call to endless love;

To mimic what is only seen above!
So in my heart I stored His every word,
Finding new life in all that I had heard,
Which gave me hope to surpass morrow's test:
¹¹⁵ A cloak of comfort as my mind took rest.

In early morn, our journey had resumed,
And with it, my own zeal had boldly bloomed;
I was as flower grown through rocky road:
Miraculous; strange place for petals sowed,
¹²⁰ Yet its contrast revealed a hope so new:
As life thrusts up from stone, was I so too
Uprooted from the darkness of the night
And given place to dwell amidst the light.
My thankfulness became my strength and song,
¹²⁵ As over these new plains I trod along.
Yet something in the fields attention caught:
Another wooden cross, seeming forgot
Amidst the tallgrass, in the open lay
Abandoned, without pilgrim to display.
¹³⁰ This troubled me, yet as I carried on,
More crosses did I find with bearers gone.
They filled the grassy plain, spread here and there,

And led me to such thoughts it hurt to bear:

How many had set out on this same trail,

¹³⁵ And left behind their calling in betrayal?

Back to the worldly forests they had fled;

In hopes of more free life, they chased the dead

And ended up among those chained to sin,

Their souls vessels for wretched Death to win.

¹⁴⁰ I looked for reassurance in His face,

Yet too He mourned for those rejecting grace.

Twas clear how greatly He could love and cherish,

Not wanting e'en a single soul to perish

But all to join Him in endless life,

¹⁴⁵ A prize that was much worth each day of strife.

Yet we, in comfort, so oft from Him stray,

For we have preference of our own heart's way

Of fleshly pleasures, carnal joys partake

Our fallen nature, brought low by the snake.

¹⁵⁰ And so, these thoughts of sorrow conscience stained,

Led me to think as those whose faith had waned:

Of all the earthly pleasures from my past,

And more, of what time I indulged them last.

These pleasures whispered doubts that my mind gripped,

¹⁵⁵ In momentary weakness, I then tripped

And tumbled from the path to dirt below,
The cross thrown from my hand, what great sorrow!
At this loud sound, my Guide turned back to see
What tragic fate had then befallen me.

¹⁶⁰ And as I laid there, dazed in my regret,
He to my side did come, so faithful yet,
And though I thought His anger I'd provoked,
He offered me His hand, and tears evoked
In mine eyes and streaming down my face:

¹⁶⁵ How I, as man, am worthy of His grace?
For when I fell and strayed in mind and heart,
He did not from me in those fields depart.
Instead, he offered to me his right hand,
To forgive my transgressions, help me stand

¹⁷⁰ Again, to look toward the path untread,
With hope, for I'm no longer of the dead.

He led me by the hand to fallen cross,
And asked me to reclaim my careless loss,
Yet right before I took it from its place,

¹⁷⁵ He took the chance, reminding me of grace:
“Do you remember why you bear this sign?”

All I knew was for some reason divine.
He carried on: “This cross is hope for all,

For on it, I have died to end the Fall;

¹⁸⁰ To forgive sin in future, present, past,

To give you hope that will forever last.

No matter what you've done, I'll always be;

I'll come to you if you will trust in me.

Now claim again this cross, with reason new

¹⁸⁵ To carry with fresh joy my gift to you."

My heart had never been such well appealed

As when, to me, His sacrifice revealed.

Though I'd of His salvation heard before,

I'd lost what I was bearing that cross for,

¹⁹⁰ And having it refreshed from His own word,

Brought strength to arms, my spirit again stirred

To heed the call and bear the weight once more,

And so, I did, much stronger than before.

Yet as I carried on behind my Guide,

¹⁹⁵ My heart still mourned the ones who left His side;

Each unkept cross, expansion of sin's slaves,

A thought which haunted me through field of graves.

And furthermore, I was here on my own,

To hold this cross and pursue Him alone

²⁰⁰ Though having been encouraged to relate

With others, and thus bear each other's weight.

This thought of mine I did to Him relay,

And this He answered me without delay:

“My son, I know how hard it’s been to stride

²⁰⁵ Without another like you by your side.

It’s honored me how you alone endured

Yet solitude, for your sake, will be cured.

Yes, soon indeed you will companions meet

And you will each give strength to other’s feet.

²¹⁰ There’s one among them who will catch your eye;

It’s her that one day soon you shall rely,

And as one flesh, you’ll be together bound

As you pursue me on this sacred ground.

Hold fast to friends, hold closer to your wife,

²¹⁵ For they will walk with you through all your strife.”

And thus, like-minded gifts were promised me

Among them, one who soon my wife would be.

With what joy did I carry on that day!

My eager eyes set further down the way

²²⁰ In hopes I would encounter soon my friends

And have more joyful passage to my ends.

As sun came down to the horizon kiss,

The One who is my source of endless bliss

Had just prepared to end our daily walk,

²²⁵ When close to us, we heard some joyful talk.

And sure enough, we soon spotted a camp,

Its fire burning as a beacon lamp.

Excitedly, I looked toward my Guide,

Who nodded, His great pleasure to provide.

²³⁰ With eagerness, we hastened to the group,

And many smiles met us from that troupe.

Great their rejoicing was to see their Lord

At work in leading me to path restored.

With open arms, they then with me embraced;

²³⁵ Grateful was I with them to have been placed!

Such fellowship like I had never felt

Was here before me, with whom I now dwelt.

And such as was the subject of His word,

There was a woman whom I thence preferred

²⁴⁰ Above the rest, though to all I would share

Of my short journey: when, how, and from where.

I spent the night with them in perfect peace,

For those I'd call my family did increase.

From that point forward, walked we all as one,

²⁴⁵ In burdens and shared strides toward the Son.

Such fellowship did much to my faith lift,

And kept me further from attempts to drift

And fall again from path down righteous mount;

We did to one another keep account.

²⁵⁰ And faithful was our Guide through every part

Who would not let even one walk apart,

For many times did He chase one who strayed,

While leaving ninety-nine of us who stayed.

To, as good Shepherd, every sheep defend,

²⁵⁵ He would pursue us to the bitter end.

And to the maiden whom my fate was bound,

So many wondrous qualities we found

In one another, uncovered such love

Brought forth by shared pursuit of Him above.

²⁶⁰ In tears and laughter through our journeys long,

We learned what joy it was to share one song,

And thus determined our fate to be so:

To one another we would always go.

To marriage we resolved, what joyous news!

²⁶⁵ Yet for each other, we would have to lose

The depth of fellowship we'd shared with all

To focus more attention on this call.

With family and friends we'd always mesh,
Though never quite as close as our one flesh.
²⁷⁰ Yet to this choice we hold and now prepare
To go from two to one, in all things share,
And how best to proceed in combined stride
To Him whose love is endless, side-by-side.

So this is where things stand with my account,
²⁷⁵ Though one last part of journey I'll recount
To demonstrate for what purpose I write
The words you read. It happened on this night
As we sat, relishing in fire's heat,
Which was our custom after day complete,
²⁸⁰ Our Savior rose and to all, He addressed:
"My children, I have for each a request;
To each I shall bestow a unique gift,
And each shall use it to my message lift."
And after all He'd given, there was more?
²⁸⁵ I never lost reasons to thank Him for.
Then, my mind raced, in wonder of what role
He'd give to one with such a youthful soul.
And when it was my turn to gift receive,
He gave me charge I could hardly believe:

²⁹⁰ “Now I bestow upon you sheet and quill

For with your every word, you’ll do my will.”

And sure enough, I took paper and pen,

Thus honored to have been chosen again,

This time for such a task of bold value:

²⁹⁵ To with His praises every word imbue.

And further task He went on to describe:

“You now, my son, are to me as a scribe.

With written word for which you are so fond,

You will help my love reach to those beyond

³⁰⁰ This little band of pilgrims, and shine light

Into surrounding darkness, hopeless night,

Remembering with every feather stroke,

The wisdom and new hope that I have spoke.

Recall, son, how I brought you from your death

³⁰⁵ And gave you second birth with Spirit’s breath.

Now, take the hope that I to you bestowed,

And show to all my great love overflowed.”

With tears welled in my eyes, I nodded yes,

Ironically, without words to express

³¹⁰ My utmost joy to this tall task assume

And bring to all the hope of empty tomb.

You, my dear reader, witness my first piece

As one whose life belongs to Prince of Peace.

To many more will my quill soon embark

³¹⁵ In bringing others like me out of dark.

Yet I thought it quite fitting to start here:

Where everything began, when Hope drew near.

This tale is but the start of a new life,

As I follow the Savior through my strife,

³²⁰ And everyday, I strive to make the choice

To turn from my own sin and hear His voice.

My life will soon evolve, yet through it all,

I dedicate my pen to heed His call.

For I know even when all things seem grim

³²⁵ I will take up my cross and follow Him.