

The Faithful Intone in Latin

by John Cantey Knight

*“usque ego postera crescā laude recens, dum
Capitolium scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex” **

—Horace

He looks at the vast emptiness in this sacred place.
Still, the vaulted air has substance. His breath
breathes its prayers, hopes, fears, the age-old words
of faith into the mother’s womb of the sacrosanct.
Opening his eyes, there is bitterness
and remembrance of how as a youth this sanctuary
was filled on the holy days with believers. Outside,
over his lifetime, it is no longer the same world.
Where once one knew who he was,
the country he was born to, its customs, its ways,
now foreigners flock the streets, strange cults
and beliefs permeate gullible minds and corrupt
the nation’s adolescents. “Virgin” no longer connotes
an accolade; perversion, corruption, the norms;
money made, the only god for most. *Father Jupiter,*
he prayed, *I am old. All my days, I have worshiped
faithfully. My sacrifices have been
offered in your honor. You have blessed me,
but my young wife and my daughter have turned
to the false gods of the East. Their mysteries
are shameless debaucheries, the rites suitable
for whores and their consorts. All Rome has become
a brothel. A foreigner, I die in my own beloved country.*

* “I shall arise with fresh praise in the future, as long as the high priest
climbs the Capitoline Hill with silent virgins” —Horace