

A LITURGY FOR

Relapse

JOHN DONNE (1572–1631)

MODERN RENDERING BY PHILIP YANCEY

O eternal and most gracious God,
you invite us to approach you in prayer
and bring our petitions to you.
So now I come to you with two requests.
I have meditated on your honor,
and concluded that nothing comes nearer
to violating that honor than to beg
for your forgiveness, receive it, and then
return to the sin that prompted my request.
That resembles a kind of spiritual fornication.

Your correction has brought me to a state
of union with you. O my God, the God of
constancy and perseverance, preserve me
in this state from all relapses into those sins
that you have corrected, and then forgiven.

Because I know my slippery self all too well,
I presume to add this petition too: that you not
forsake me if my infirmity overtakes me.

Say to my soul,
My son, you have sinned; do so no more.

But say also that,
even if I do,
your spirit of remorse and conviction
shall never depart from me.

Your holy apostle, St. Paul, endured
three shipwrecks and still was saved.
Though the rocks and the sands,
the heights and the shallows,
the prosperity and the adversity
of this world, do threaten me, and though
my own leaky soul endanger me,
may I *hold on to faith and a good conscience,*
and not join those who *have rejected*
and so have suffered shipwreck
with regard to the faith.

Then your everlasting mercy will shelter me,
even if what I most earnestly pray against
might befall me, a relapse into those sins
 which I have truly repented,
 and you have fully pardoned.