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Arthur Ramírez

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The Storm and Mom’s Prayers, or How I Lost My Religion

ARTHUR RAMÍREZ
AUSTIN, TEXAS

After the sun was blotted out, the wind picked up. A strange windiness and a tense humidity were followed by a few drops of rain that became heavier and heavier. Lightning and thunder and a strong whirling wind broke the earlier stillness. The rain and the wind made the fine mesquite trees in front of our house swing about wildly, skeletal but with no firmness.

The storm hit us with so much force that it went beyond storms experienced before. We had no warning, no expectation, that this storm would not only strike, but be so powerful.

My sister was four, and I, five. We weren’t yet of school age, so we had stayed home with Mom. The storm’s blinding rain meant we couldn’t see outside, but storm sounds increased. Mom’s response was more immediate than usual when a storm hit. After circling through the house, Mom genuflected and kneeled in a corner of the living room. She signaled for us to do the same, and we did.

Mom said, “Let’s pray.”

The storm was scary. Mom started off by reciting the Lord’s Prayer: “En el nombre de Dios, Jesucristo y el Espíritu Santo.”

To add to my fears, after reciting some prayers from her rosary, she really scared me. “Look around carefully,” she said. “Ay Dios, the roof or the walls might collapse. Then we’ll have to figure out what to do. This house is so flimsy.”

Mom, as she looked around while reciting the prayers, noticed that I wasn’t saying them too. I was too scared now by Mom’s shaky voice and trembling hand. She raised her voice, panicky, and asked me, “Why aren’t you praying?”

The truth is I wanted to pray but I told her, “I don’t remember them.” And, I added, “I’m trying to say what you say, but the storm is too loud.”

Mom said, “I have to protect you.” Now almost hysterical, she again mentioned how the roof or walls might collapse.

“We have to avoid getting crushed or drowning.”

The storm seemed to go on and on, but after a good while the storm subsided, and an uncertain stillness returned. Now Mom almost sneered at us, and seemed cruel and superior to us.

“Did you kids really think that the house would collapse and we would die?” she said.

She said it more with relief than lording it over her two little kids. I could see in her face that she was actually ashamed of showing us her panic. No, she hadn’t played a dirty trick by scaring us, and now she could calmly thank the Lord for saving us.

At that moment, I came to several life-long conclusions. One, the storm was a natural phenomenon—God had nothing to do with it. Two, it all wasn’t so serious a crisis as Mom made it out to be—it wasn’t apocalyptic. Three, prayer had nothing to do with the lifting of the storm—the two were completely separate. Fourth, at that moment I gave up prayer. I never even tried to remember the prayers I used to know. Fifth, clearly God did not exist and religion was useless. Sixth, Mom, though loving and meaning well, was weird and panicky. She made me realize that I should take everything with a grain of salt. And discount authority and the surface of things.
Fernando Llort, *Eterno Sol de Esperanza*, mixed media on cotton paper, 19.6” x 24”, 2000