

Faith is a Great Tree

Faith is a great tree
an oak rooted in the heart of the earth

Under the wings of the tree
Love, my daughter, shelters all the distressed of the world.

Hope, my little one, is only the slight promise of a bud
which finally appears at the beginning of April.

And when one sees the tree, when you look at the oak,
the rough oak bark forty, ninety, four hundred years old
this tough, hard, wrinkled bark
and the branches like a mass of enormous arms
and the roots that thrust themselves down
and grasp the earth like a mass of enormous legs

When you see then
how the strength and roughness of the little tender bud
appears to be nothing at all,
how it appears to hang on the tree, to eat at the tree's table
like mistletoe, like a fungus,
how it appears to depend on the tree
to be able to do nothing, be nothing without the tree,

nevertheless, it is the other way round.

Without the coming of the bud, nothing would last
without the sap that rises and weeps
without the millions of buds
that tenderly pierce the hard armpits of the branches.

Everything must hold together.

All Life comes tenderly
all life comes from this tender April bud that is wrapped in layers of soft vegetable fibre.
This fleecy wrapping is the secret of life.

The hard bark of the tree appears like armour in comparison to this tender bud.

But the hard bark is nothing other than the hardened bud.

Without the tender bud, which seems like nothing
there would only be dead wood thrown on the fire.



Charles Péguy
La Mystère des Saints Innocents
translated by Anne Primavesi and Colin Carr
from the twelfth workbook jottings for the fifth centenary year (1912) of the birth of Joan of Arc