

St. Cuthbert and the Otters

By Christine Valters Paintner



The saint stands immersed in the North Sea,
his nightly vigil, waves lap his beard,
offers prayers of wildness and wakefulness,
the moon is a communion wafer
floating across sky.

He smiles as curious seals swim past,
when dawn approaches, birds open
their beaks in song, land on his shoulders.

Each morning he steps back onto shore
with wrinkled toes, skin pale blue,
two otters scurry over,
warm him with fish-hued breath,
wrap themselves around his frigid feet,
until he can wiggle them again,

they beckon him to romp and frolic
and in the midst of this otter-saint
rumble-rumpus, lost in laughter,
he forgets himself, forgets the many
names of God, realizes
this too is a kind of prayer.