Poetry by Jim Blackburn
Art by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

Baltimore Oriole

At the lot on Sheepshead Street on South Padre
Purchased by the Valley Land Fund for the birds.

The orange and black orioles dash to and fro
From the fruit that was placed to welcome them –
To nourish them – on their long trip north,
Orioles that inspire prayer within me,
Welling up thoughts of gratitude,
Offering me a glimpse of divinity,
An orange and black sign from above,
A song of connectedness with something large,
Something larger than any one of us –
Something larger than all of us –
An orange and black sign from above
That all is well with the Earth today,
Comforting my fears, meeting my needs,
Ensuring me that life is worth living
And that the sun will rise again,
Hope, satisfaction, love and joy,
All in an orange and black package,
And I am thankful for stewards
Like the Valley Land Fund,
Keepers of the Biblical mandate
To care for creation, to keep the garden,
Celebrating that which was called “good”.
Restoring my soul. Amen.

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Orchard Oriole

Why do we pray?
Is it to help us sleep?
Is it to be thankful?
Is it to ask for more?
Or is it to seek retribution?

Why do we pray to a God?
How do we choose which one?
The one of our parents?
The pretty one? Or the mean one?
Or maybe the one that sends a sign?

I pray to the migrating songbirds
Whose return restores my faith
For another year.
I cheer the orioles
And hail the tanagers,
And applaud the warblers
Whose hopeful journey reinforces
My hopeful journey.
I see them flying across the water,
Reaching the Texas coast,
Falling to the Earth,
Safe again, both of us.

I pray to them because it feels right.
I ask them for courage to do what is right.
I ask them for eyes to see what we are.
I reach out for a connection
That will make me one
With other living things,
With the energy that is life.

And when my prayer is over,
I feel better which is, after all,
Why we pray.