

In the Church of Sant'Andrea, Orvieto

by [Paul Willis](#) in the [July 2023](#) issue

Twelve stone steps rise to the pulpit,  
wrapping around a granite column  
beside a crooked banister.

On the column are ragged remains  
of a crude fresco in red and black.  
And among the figures in the fresco,  
a sharp-eyed woman, robed and hooded,  
looks down (then up) at the holy priest  
as he ascends—as if to say,  
*Watch your words. I'm listening.*  
On other days, however, she says,  
*Don't worry. You can do this.*

In the pulpit the preacher stands  
some fourteen feet above  
the heads of the congregation,  
speaking to them from on high.  
He might as well be Juliet  
on her balcony. And maybe,  
on his better days, he expresses his love  
for them as Juliet to her Romeo.

But the one he longs for is behind him,  
painted on the side of the column,  
nodding at his every phrase. After  
the homily is done, on his way  
down those twelve stone steps,  
he kisses the fingers of his hand  
and places them on her fading lips.