

Black on Black

by [Linda Vigen Phillips](#) in the [March 2025](#) issue

Published on March 11, 2025

I kneel, old knees reverence the day—
sunlit, crisped Spring air yet with a bite
soil unlike that on my sole
yet soul-worthy and oiled
on the altar, a ready reminder
dust tamed to penitence waits for me.

No need to flip pages, words branded
to bones scroll like urgent news type
across a marquee of closed eyes.
*Create in me a clean heart, oh Lord
restore a right spirit within me.*

Blackened speckles drift down from the mark
I dare not disturb. They disturb me.
In my naked awareness I wear this dirt—
moldered filthiness. I fight the urge
to swipe clean the ashes

but for the calm of rhythmic unison.
We pray, Lord hear our prayer
and now not two pews behind me
intrusive utterance of another flawed mortal
beats the cadence by a nanosecond
line by line. Unrepentant, I gauge the blackness
her dust to mine.