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# “LET ALL MORTAL FLESH KEEP SILENCE” (275 CE)

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Paraphraser: Gerard Moultrie (1864)<sup>1</sup>

Source: The Liturgy of St. James<sup>2</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE)

**Habakkuk 2:20** –

<sup>20</sup> But the LORD is in his holy temple;  
silence before him, all the earth!<sup>j</sup> <sup>3</sup>

**Sung versions:** Fernando Ortega in his album *Storm* (published 2002); Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles in their album *Angels and Saints at Ephesus* (published 2013).

**J.R. Watson, editor and commentor, *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 12-13** – “This hymn is based on the ‘Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn’ in the Liturgy of St James, which dates probably from **the fourth century**.... Although his text dates from 1864, in *Lyra Eucharistica*, Moultrie may have known the prose version. It began: ‘Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and stand with fear and trembling, and ponder nothing earthly in itself.’ .... The hymn is a sublime command, and the invocation to silence adds emphasis to the awe-inspiring greatness

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<sup>1</sup> See: [https://hymnary.org/text/let\\_all\\_mortal\\_flesh\\_keep\\_silence](https://hymnary.org/text/let_all_mortal_flesh_keep_silence) - Moultrie, Gerard, M.A., son of the Rev. John Moultrie, was born at Rugby Rectory, Sept. 16, 1829, and educated at Rugby and Exeter College, Oxford (B.A. 1851, M.A. 1856). Taking Holy Orders, he became Third Master and Chaplain in Shrewsbury School; Chaplain to the Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry, 1855-59; curate of Brightwaltham, 1859; and of Brinfield, Berks, 1860; Chaplain of the Donative of Barrow Gurney, Bristol, 1864; Vicar of Southleigh, 1869, and Warden of St. James's College, Southleigh, 1873. He died April 25, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Also, at Hymnary.org (see above) is this notation: “Evidence suggests that the Greek text of ‘Let All Mortal Flesh’ may date back to the fifth century. **The present text is from the Liturgy of St. James, a Syrian rite thought to have been written by St. James the Less, first Bishop of Jerusalem.** It is based on a prayer chanted by the priest when the bread and wine are brought to the table of the Lord.” Concerning Moultrie’s paraphrasing of the Greek text into these English lyrics: “Gerard Moultrie (b. Rugby, Warrickshire, England, 1829; d. Southleigh, England, 1885) translated the text from the Greek; his English paraphrase was first published in Orby Shipley’s *Lyra Eucharistica* (1864) and entitled “Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn.”

<sup>j</sup> Ps 11:4.

<sup>3</sup> *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Habakkuk 2:20.

of God, which is signaled in his hymn. **The is the opposite of those hymns which express the kindness and closeness of God ('What a Friend We Have in Jesus'):** here God appears in **majesty and light, accompanied by the glory of the heavenly host....** In the original Liturgy of St. James, it was used as the bread and wine were brought into the sanctuary. It brings out the full drama of the occasion."

1

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
and with fear and trembling stand;  
ponder nothing earthly-minded,  
for with blessing in his hand,  
Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
our full homage to demand.

2

King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
as of old on earth he stood,  
Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
in the body and the blood,  
he will give to all the faithful  
his own self for heav'nly food.

3

Rank on rank the host of heaven  
spreads its vanguard on the way,  
as the Light of light descendeth  
from the realms of endless day,  
that the pow'rs of hell may vanish  
as the darkness clears away.

4

At his feet the six-winged seraph,  
cherubim, with sleepless eye,  
veil their faces to the presence,  
as with ceaseless voice they cry,  
"Alleluia, alleluia,  
alleluia, Lord Most High!"

