

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.