What Is Broken Is What God Blesses
Jimmy Santiago Baca

The lover’s footprint in the sand
the ten-year-old kid’s bare feet
in the mud picking chili for rich growers,
not those seeking cultural or ethnic roots,
but those whose roots
have been exposed, hacked, dug up and burned
and in those roots
do animals burrow for warmth;
what is broken is blessed,
not the knowledge and empty-shelled wisdom
paraphrased from textbooks,
not the mimicking nor plaques of distinction
nor the ribbons and medals
but after the privileged carriage has passed
the breeze blows traces of wheel ruts away
and on the dust will again be the people’s broken
footprints.

What is broken God blesses,
not the perfectly brick-on-brick prison
but the shattered wall
that announces freedom to the world,
proclaims the irascible spirit of the human
rebelling against lies, against betrayal,
against taking what is not deserved;
the human complaint is what God blesses,
our impoverished dirt roads filled with cripples,
what is broken is baptized,
the irreverent disbeliever,
the addict’s arm seamed with needle marks
is a thread line of a blanket
frayed and bare from keeping the man warm.

We are all broken ornaments,
glinting in our worn-out work gloves,
foreclosed homes, ruined marriages,
from which shimmer our lives in their deepest truths,
blood from the wound,
broken ornaments—
when we lost our perfection and honored our imperfect sentiments, we were blessed.

Broken are the ghettos, barrios, trailer parks where gangs duel to death,
yet through the wretchedness a woman of sixty comes riding her rusty bicycle,
we embrace
we bury in our hearts,
broken ornaments, accused, hunted, finding solace and refuge
we work, we worry, we love
but always with compassion
reflecting our blessings—
in our brokenness
thrives life, thrives light, thrives
the essence of our strength,
each of us a warm fragment,
broken off from the greater
ornament of the unseen,
then rejoined as dust,
to all this is.