

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

An Invitation into the Wilderness

Ash Wednesday

Opening Words

by Denise Levertov

I believe the earth
exists, and
in each minim mote
of its dust the holy
glow of thy candle.
Thou
unknown I know,
thou spirit,
giver,
lover of making, of the
wrought letter,
wrought flower,
iron, deed, dream.
Dust of the earth,
help thou my
unbelief. Drift
gray become gold, in the beam of
vision. I believe with
doubt. I doubt and
interrupt my doubt with belief. Be,
beloved, threatened world.
Each minim
mote.
Not the poisonous
luminescence forced
out of its privacy,
The sacred lock of its cell
broken. No,
the ordinary glow
of common dust in ancient sunlight.
Be, that I may believe. Amen.

Journaling:

Thursday

but for sorrow

by Rob Suarez

I might never have asked
what could be

but for sorrow.

I might never have opened
to the terrible
vulnerability of love

but for tears.

I might never have begun
this treacherous path to
God

but for emptiness.

Source: "but for sorrow" by Rob Suarez from *America Magazine*, Vol. 184 No. 10 (3/26/2001).

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

An Invitation into the Wilderness

Friday

Late Results

by Scott Cairns

We wanted to confess our sins but there were no takers.
—Milosz

And the few willing to listen demanded that we confess on television.
So we kept our sins to ourselves, and they became less troubling.

The halt and the lame arranged to have their hips replaced.
Lepers coated their sores with a neutral foundation, avoided strong
light.

The hungry ate at grand buffets and grew huge, though they remained
hungry.
Prisoners became indistinguishable from the few who visited them.

Widows remarried and became strangers to their kin.
The orphans finally grew up and learned to fend for themselves.

Even the prophets suspected they were mad, and kept their mouths
shut.
Only the poor—who are with us always—only they continued in the
hope.

Source: "Late Results" from *Philokalia: New and Selected Poems*, by Scott
Cairns. Lincoln, Nebraska: Zoo Press, 2002.

Journaling:

Saturday

Prayer: A Progression

by Jessica Powers

You came by night, harsh with the need of grace,
into the dubious presence of your Maker.
You combed a small and pre-elected acre
for some bright word of Him, or any trace.
Past the great judgment growths of thistle and thorn
and past the thicket of self you bore your yearning
till lo, you saw a pure white blossom burning
in glimmer, then, light, then unimpeded more!

Now the flower God-is-love gives ceaseless glow;
now all your thoughts feast on its mystery,
but when love mounts through knowledge and goes free,
then will the sated thinker arise and go
and brave the deserts of the soul to give
the flower he found to the contemplative.

Source: "Prayer: A Progression" from *The Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers*,
edited by Regina Siegfried, ASC, and Robert F. Morneau. Kansas City, MO:
Sheed & Ward, 1989.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week One: An Invitation to be Bread for Others

Monday

Possible Answers to Prayer

by Scott Cairns

Your petitions—though they continue to bear
just the one signature—have been duly recorded.
Your anxieties—despite their constant,

relatively narrow scope and inadvertent
entertainment value—nonetheless serve
to bring your person vividly to mind.

Your repentance—all but obscured beneath
a burgeoning, yellow fog of frankly more
conspicuous resentment—is sufficient.

Your intermittent concern for the sick,
the suffering, the needy poor is sometimes
recognizable to me, if not to them.

Your angers, your zeal, your lipsmackingly
righteous indignation toward the many
whose habits and sympathies offend you—

these must burn away before you'll apprehend
how near I am, with what fervor I adore
precisely these, the several who rouse your passions.

Source: "Possible Answers to Prayer" from *Philokalia: New and Selected Poems*, by Scott Cairns. Lincoln, Nebraska: Zoo Press, 2002.

Journaling:

Tuesday

Beginners

by Denise Levertov

-Dedicated to the memory of Karen Silkwood and Eliot Gralla

*"From too much love of living, Hope and desire set free,
Even the weariest river winds somewhere to the sea—"*

But we have only begun
To love the earth.

We have only begun
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
—so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?
—we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision

how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.

Surely our river
cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot
drag, in the silt,
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet—
there is too much broken
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,
so much is in bud.

Source: "Beginners" from *Candles in Babylon*, by Denise Levertov. New York: New Directions, 1982.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week One: An Invitation to be Bread for Others

Wednesday

We Wear the Mask

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Source: "We Wear the Mask" from *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1913.

Journaling:

Thursday

Night Thoughts

by William F. Bell

It is our emptiness and lowliness that God needs, and not our plenitude. —Mother Teresa

Somehow by day, no matter what,
I patch myself together whole,
But all my effort can't offset
The nightly nakedness of soul
When angels in a dark descent
Strip off my integument.

I am a cornered rebel pinched
Between night's armies and my lack,
And when inside the bedclothes hunched
I feel the force of their attack,
I hardly know what I can do,
Exposed to God at half-past two.

I once believed my being full,
But night thoughts prove that it is not.
Waking scared and miserable,
I scrape the bottom of the pot
And then must bow down and confess
Totality of emptiness.

Kings once ventured, it is said,
To offer gold and frankincense,
But I send nothing from my bed
Except a tattered penitence,
So very little has accrued
From years of doubtful plenitude.

God who tear away my cover,
Oh, pour your Spirit into me
Until my emptiness runs over
With golden superfluity,
And I bow down and offer up
Yourself within my earthen cup.

Source: "Night Thoughts" by William Bell from *America Magazine*, Vol. 187 No. 18 (12/2/2002).

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week One: An Invitation to be Bread for Others

Friday

The Uses of Sorrow

by Mary Oliver

Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.

Source: "The Uses of Sorrow" from *Thirst*, by Mary Oliver. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Journaling:

Saturday

What I Pray For

by Dennis O'Donnell

Sacks of rocks
I have gathered from the beach,
some of which I used to toss
my own I Ching, stones representing
fire, water, wind, and the rest,
some of them with strange,
man-like markings, like circles,
probably formed by little pools of sea water,
dried by the sun, leaving behind
a round stain of salt.

Stacks of poems, sacks of rocks,
milk crates full of books
full of baloney:
I can't let them go, not yet,
but I lie in bed and plead with God
to empty out my past, all of it,
at least all of the bad,
set me free, flush out
all the shame and rage and heartache,
but please, not the finger-paints,
not baseball and my best friends.

Deal, He says,
but all the rocks must go.
No tarot cards, and no metaphysical bull.

Fine, I say.
I have a look at my bookcase.
I see Rumi, Suzuki, Lao Tzu,
and two Bibles. So:
who will throw the first stone?

Source: "What I Pray For" by Dennis O'Donnell from *America Magazine*, Vol. 190 No. 6 (2/23/2004).

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Two: An Invitation to Awaken

Monday

To Live in the Mercy of God

by Denise Levertov

To lie back under the tallest
oldest trees. How far the stems
rise, rise
 before ribs of shelter
 open!

To live in the mercy of God. The complete
sentence too adequate, has no give.
Awe, not comfort. Stone, elbows of
stony wood beneath lenient
moss bed.

And awe suddenly
passing beyond itself. Becomes
a form of comfort.

 Becomes the steady
air you glide on, arms
stretched like the wings of flying foxes.
To hear the multiple silence
of trees, the rainy
forest depths of their listening.

To float, upheld,
 as salt water
 would hold you,
 once you dared.

To live in the mercy of God.

To feel vibrate the enraptured

waterfall flinging itself
unabating down and down
 to clenched fists of rock.

Swiftness of plunge,
hour after year after century,
 O or Ah

uninterrupted, voice
many-stranded.
 To breathe
spray. The smoke of it.

 Arcs
of steelwhite foam, glissades
of fugitive jade barely perceptible. Such passion—
rage or joy?

 Thus, not mild, not temperate,
God's love for the world. Vast
flood of mercy
 flung on resistance.

Source: "To Live in the Mercy of God" from *Sands from the Well*, by Denise Levertov. New York: New Directions, 1996.

Tuesday

The Rowing Endeth

by Anne Sexton

I'm mooring my rowboat
at the dock of the island called God.
This dock is made in the shape of a fish
and there are many boats moored
at many different docks.
"It's okay," I say to myself,
with blisters that broke and healed
and broke and headed—saving
themselves over and over.
And salt sticking to my face and arms like
a glue-skin pocked with grains of tapioca.
I empty myself from my wooden boat
and onto the flesh of The Island.

"On with it!" He says and thus
we squat on the rocks by the sea
and play—can it be true—a
game of poker.
He calls me.
I win because I hold a royal straight flush.
He wins because He holds five aces.

A wild card had been announced
but I had not beard it
being in such a state of awe
when He took out the cards and dealt.
As he plunks down His five aces
and I sit grinning at my royal flush,
He starts to laugh,
the laughter rolling like a hoop out of His mouth
and into mine,
and such laughter that He doubles right over me
laughing a Rejoice Chores at our two triumphs.
Then I laugh, the fishy dock laughs
the sea laughs. The Island laughs.
The Absurd laughs.

Dearest dealer,

I with my royal straight flush,
love you so for your wild card,
that untamable, eternal, gut-driven ha-ha
and lucky love.

Source: "The Rowing Endeth" from *The Awful Rowing Toward God* by Anne Sexton. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Two: An Invitation to Awaken

Wednesday

In Praise of Self-Deprecation

by Wislawa Szymborska

The buzzard has nothing to fault himself with.
Scruples are alien to the black panther.
Piranhas do not doubt the rightness of their actions.
The rattlesnake approves of himself without reservations.

The self-critical jackal does not exist.
The locust, alligator, trichina, horsefly
live as they live and are glad of it.

The killer whale's heart weighs one hundred kilos
but in other respects it is light.

There is nothing more animal-like
than a clear conscience
on the third planet of the Sun.

Source: "In Praise of Self-Deprecation" from *A Book of Luminous Things: And International Anthology of Poetry*, by Milosz Czelslaw, ed. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998.

Journaling:

Thursday

Alone

by Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Source: "Alone" from *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*, by Maya Angelou. New York: Random House, Inc., 1975.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Two: An Invitation to Awaken

Friday

Think Not How Far

by Harold Macdonald

Think not how far we have to go,
 how far we've come; it saps the strength,
 melts the will. It's better not to know
 the breadth and height and length
 of all that's still ahead.
 Who wants to learn one's end?
 What will be, what would have been - weigh like lead.
 Past offenses change not, cannot mend.
 Better to proceed by little steps
 within your range; no sweat, regret, no strain;
 blanking out dramatic heights and depths
 the thought of chasms, rough terrain.
 Time then to see God's downward bending
 to share the journey and the ending.

Source: "Think Not How Far" from *Poems from the Eighth Decade*, by Harold Macdonald. 2004.

Journaling:

Saturday

Open Your Eyes

by Richard Guy Miller

We never really die.
 We just open our eyes.

When they have seen
 Their last limitation,
 We turn and weep,
 Or we awake from our dream,
 Open our eyes and know...

We never really die.
 We just open our eyes.

When we have seen
 Our last limitation,
 We turn and weep,
 Or we awake from our dream,
 Open our eyes and know...

We never really lived.
 We just closed our eyes.

Source: "Open Your Eyes" by Richard Guy Miller. *Meditate with Poetry*, 2003. <http://www.explorefaith.org/oasis/poetry/openEyes.html>.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Three: An Invitation to Liberation

Friday

Prayer

by Thomas a Kempis

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know,
To love what I ought to love,
To praise what delights thee most,
To value what is precious in thy sight,
To hate what is offensive to thee.
Do not suffer me to judge according to the sight of my eyes,
Nor to pass sentence according to the hearing
of the ears of ignorant men;
But to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual,
And above all, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of thy will.

Source: "Prayer" from *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. New York: Random House, 1998.

Journaling:

Saturday

What to Remember When Waking

by David Whyte

In that first hardly noticed moment in which you wake,
coming back to this life from the other,
more secret, movable and frighteningly honest world
where everything began,
there is a small opening into the new day
which closes the moment you begin your plans.

What you can plan is too small for you to live.

What you can live wholeheartedly
will make plans enough for the vitality
hidden in your sleep.

To be human is to become visible
while carrying what is hidden
as a gift to others.

To remember the other world in this world
is to live in your true inheritance.

You are not a troubled guest on this earth,
you are not an accident amidst other accidents.
You were invited from another and greater night
than the one from which you have just emerged.

Now looking through
the slanting light of the morning window
toward the mountain presence
of everything that can be,
what urgency calls you to your one love?
What shape waits in the seed of you
to grow and spread its branches
against a future sky?

Is it waiting in the fertile sea?
In the trees beyond the house?
In the life you can imagine for yourself?
In the open and lovely
white page on the waiting desk?

Source: "What to Remember When Waking" from *The House of Belonging* by David Whyte. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 2004.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Four: An Invitation to be Reconciled

Monday

Tomorrow's Children

by Rubem Alves

What is hope?
 It is a presentiment that imagination is more real
 and reality less real than it looks.
 It is a hunch
 that the overwhelming brutality of facts
 that oppress and repress is not the last word.
 It is a suspicion
 that reality is more complex
 than realism wants us to believe
 and that the frontiers of the possible
 are not determined by the limits of the actual
 and that in a miraculous and unexpected way
 life is preparing the creative events
 which will open the way to freedom and resurrection....
 The two, suffering and hope, live from each other.
 Suffering without hope
 produces resentment and despair,
 hope without suffering
 creates illusions, naivete, and drunkenness....
 Let us plant dates
 even though those who plant them will never eat them.
 We must live by the love of what we will never see.
 This is the secret discipline.
 It is a refusal to let the creative act
 be dissolved in immediate sense experience
 and a stubborn commitment to the future of our grandchildren.
 Such disciplined love
 is what has given prophets, revolutionaries and saints
 the courage to die for the future they envisaged.
 They make their own bodies
 the seed of their highest hope.

Source: "Tomorrow's Children" from *Hijos de Maoana*, by Rubem Alves. Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Sigueme, 1976.

Journaling:

Tuesday

A Sick Person's Complaint

by Edward Caswall

Hail holy Sacrament,
 The worlds great VVonderment,
 Mysterious Banquet, much more rare
 Then Manna, or the Angels fare;
 Each crum, though sinners on thee feed,
 Doth Cleopatra's Perl exceed.

Oh how my Soul doth hunger, thirst and pine
 After these Cates so precious, so divine!

She need not bring her Stool
 As some unbidden Fool;
 The Master of this Heavenly Feast
 Invites and woos her for his Guest:
 Though Deaf and Lame, Forlorn and Blind,
 Yet welcome here she's sure to find,
 So that she bring a Vestment for the day,
 And her old tatter'd Rags throw quite away.

This is Bethsaida's Pool
 That can both cleanse and cool
 Poor leprous and diseased souls,
 An Angel here keeps and controls,
 Descending gently from the Heavens above
 To stir the waters; May He also move
 My mind, and rocky heart so strike and rend,
 That tears may thence gush out with them to blend.

Source: "A Sick Person's Complaint" from *Hymns and Poems*, Original and Translated by Edward Caswall. London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1873.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Four: An Invitation to be Reconciled

Friday

A Psalm of Life

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream! —
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Find us farther than today.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our heats, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead
Act, - act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead.

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
a forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us then be up and doing,
with a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

Source: "A Psalm of Life" from *The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1893.

Saturday

Now I Become Myself

by May Sarton (1912-1995)

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
"Hurry, you will be dead before—"
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted so by love.
Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I love
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

Source: "Now I Become Myself" from *Collected Poems 1930-1993*, by May Sarton. New York: Norton, 1993.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Five: An Invitation to Live in Faith

Monday

Annunciation

by Denise Levertov

'Hail, space for the uncontained God' From the Agathistos Hymn, Greece, VI

We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,
almost always a lectern, a book;
always the tall lily.

Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,
whom she acknowledges, a guest.
But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions
courage.

The engendering Spirit
did not enter her without consent.

God waited.

She was free
to accept or to refuse, choice
integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations
of one sort or another
in most lives?

Some unwillingly
undertake great destinies,
enact them in sullen pride,
uncomprehending.

More often
those moments
when roads of light and storm
open from darkness in a man or woman,
are turned away from
in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair
and with relief.

Ordinary lives continue.
God does not smite them.
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She had been a child who played, ate, slept
like any other child – but unlike others,
wept only for pity, laughed
in joy not triumph.

Compassion and intelligence
fused in her, indivisible.
Called to a destiny more momentous
than any in all of Time,
she did not quail,

only asked
a simple, 'How can this be?'
and gravely, courteously,
took to heart the angel's reply,
perceiving instantly
the astounding ministry she was offered:
to bear in her womb
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry in hidden, finite inwardness,
nine months of Eternity; to contain
in slender vase of being,
the sum of power –
in narrow flesh,
the sum of light.

Then bring to birth,
push out into air, a Man-child
needing, like any other,
milk and love –

but who was God.

Source: "Annunciation" from *The Stream and the Sapphire*, by Denise Levertov.
New York: New Directions Publishing, 1997.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Five: An Invitation to Live in Faith

Tuesday

The Ledge of Light

by Jessica Powers

I have climbed up out of a narrow darkness
on to a ledge of light.
I am of God; I was not made for night.

Here there is room to lift my arms and sing.
Oh, God is vast! With Him all space can come
to hole or corner or cubiculum.

Though once I prayed, "O closed Hand holding me..."
I know Love, not a vise. I see aright,
set free in morning on this ledge of light.

Yet not all truth I see. Since I am not
yet one of God's partakers,
I visualize Him now: a thousand acres.

God is a thousand acres to me now
of high sweet-smelling April and the flow
of windy light across a wide plateau.

Ah, but when love grows unitive I know
joy will upsoar, my heart sing, far more free,
having come home to God's infinity.



Journaling:

Source: "The Ledge of Light" from *The Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers*, edited by Regina Siegfried and Robert F. Morneau. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989.

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Five: An Invitation to Live in Faith

Wednesday

Psalm 25:6-10

Show me your ways, O Lord,
 teach me your paths;
 guide me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are God my Savior,
 and my hope is in you all day long.
 Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love,
 for they are from of old.
 Remember not the sins of my youth
 and my rebellious ways;
 according to your love remember me,
 for you are good, O Lord.

Journaling:

Thursday

Messenger

by Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.
 Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird –
 equal seekers of sweetness.
 Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
 Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
 Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
 keep my mind on what matters,
 which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be
 astonished.
 The phoebe, the delphinium.
 The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
 Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
 And these body-clothes,
 A mouth with which to give shouts of joy
 To the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
 Telling them all, over and over, how it is
 that we live forever.

Source: "Messenger" from *Thirst*, by Mary Oliver. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Week Six: An Invitation to Surrender to Grace

Monday

Exquisite Corpse

by Scott Dalgarno

Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper.

—John 12:1-2

Four days dead and sipping soup, Lazarus
Sits up, grunts, asks, "What's today?" He reeks
Of tomb, but no one blanches at this banquet.

Sister Martha feeds him, wipes his chin, reminding him
Of time and mass and the unforgiving weight of resuscitation.
There's that late-charge he thought he was clear of,

And the pruning, and that long look a bar-maid
Once gave him, but that's all in Lazarus' moldy brain.
The guests merely gape; the vacuum of the tomb

Has sucked every verb from the house, but Mary
Has an idea. She produces a jar of nard, pure, priceless,
And glopky as death. She smashes it like some Jeremiah,

Peeling the fractured alabaster, lavishing the ooze
On Jesus' chapped knees and feet. All stand transfixed,
But Lazarus' eyes are still on Martha's spoon,

Hovering a bit out of reach. Slowly he searches the room
For an explanation. There's Mary, as busy as a Martha,
And Martha, nonplussed, her heart churning envy and disgust.

What kind of household is this, Lazarus wonders,
Where the dead are fed and the living embalmed?
Nothing sealed is safe; nothing at rest left undisturbed

By the merciless provocations of the living.

Source: "Exquisite Corpse" by Scott Dalgarno from *America Magazine*, Vol. 192 No. 9 (3/14/2005).

Journaling:

Tuesday

The Vine

by Thomas Merton

When wind and winter turn our vineyard
To a bitter Calvary,
What hands come out and crucify us
Like the innocent vine?

How long will starlight weep as sharp as thorns
In the night of our desolate life?
How long will moonlight fear to free the naked prisoner?
Or is there no deliverer?

A mob of winds, on Holy Thursday, come like murderers
And batter the walls of our locked and terrified souls.
Our doors are down, and our defense is done.
Good Friday's rains, in Roman order,
March, with sharpest lances, up our vineyard hill.

More dreadful than St. Peter's cry
When he was being swallowed in the sea,
Cries out our anguish: "O! We are abandoned!"
When in our life we see the ruined vine
Cut open by the cruel spring,
Ploughed by the furious season!

As if we had forgotten how the whips of winter
And the cross of April
Would all be lost in one bright miracle.
For look! The vine on Calvary is bright with branches!
See how the leaves laugh in the light,
And how the whole hill smiles with flowers:
And know how all our numbered veins must run
With life, like the sweet vine, when it is full of sun.

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Triduum: An Invitation to Surrender to Grace

Friday: Triduum

Simon Peter

by John Poch

*There are three things which are too wonderful for me,
Yes, four which I do not understand.*

*The way of an eagle in the air,
The way of a serpent on a rock,
The way of a ship in the heart of the sea,
And the way of a man with a maid*

—Prov. 30:18, 19

I

Contagious as a yawn, denial poured
over me like a soft fall fog, a girl
on a carnation strewn parade float, waving
at everyone and no one, boring and bored
There actually was a robed commotion parading.
I turned and turned away and turned. A swirl

of wind pulled back my hood, a fire of coal
brightened my face, and those around me whispered:
You're one of them, aren't you? You smell like fish.
And wine, someone else joked. That's brutal. That's cold,
I said, and then they knew me by my speech.
They let me stay and we told jokes like fisher-

men and houseboys. We gossiped till the cock crowed,
his head a small volcano raised to mock stone.

II

Who could believe a woman's word, perfumed
in death? I did. I ran and was outrun
before I reached the empty tomb. I stepped
inside an empty shining shell of a room,
sans pearl. I walked back home alone and wept
again. At dinner. His face shone like the sun.

I went out into the night. I was a sailor
and my father's nets were calling. It was high tide,
I brought the others. Nothing, the emptiness
of business, the hypnotic waves of failure.
But a voice from shore, a familiar fire, and the nets
were full. I wouldn't be outswum, denied

this time. The coal-fire before me, the netted fish
behind. I'm carried where I will not wish.

Source: "Simon Peter" by John Poch from *America Magazine*, Vol. 188 No. 7 (3/10/2003).

Saturday: Triduum

The Magdalen, a Garden and This

by Kathleen O'Toole

She who is known by myth and association
as sinful, penitent, voluptuous perhaps...
but faithful to the last and then beyond.

A disciple for sure, confused often with Mary,
sister of Lazarus, or the woman caught
in adultery, or she who angered the men

by anointing Jesus with expensive oils.
She was the one from whom he cast out seven
demons—she's named in that account.

Strip all else away and we know only
that she was grateful, that she found her way
to the cross, and that she returned

to the tomb, to the garden nearby, and there,
weeping at her loss, was recognized,
became known in the tender invocation

of her name. *Mary*: breathed by one
whom she mistook for the gardener, he
who in an instant brought her back to herself—

gave her in two syllables a life beloved,
gave me the only sure thing I'll believe
of heaven, that if it be, it will consist

in this: the one unmistakable
rendering of your name.

Source: "The Magdalen, a Garden and This" by Kathleen O'Toole from *America Magazine* Vol. 186 No. 11 (4/1/2002).

Journaling:

LENTEN POETRY COMPANION

Easter: An Invitation to Resurrect Hope

Easter Sunday

The Answer

by R.S. Thomas

Not darkness but twilight
In which even the best
of minds must make its way
now. And slowly the questions
occur, vague but formidable
for all that. We pass our hands
over their surface like blind
men feeling for the mechanism
that will swing them aside. They
yield, but only to re-form
as new problems; and one
does not even do that
but towers immovable
before us.

Is there no way
of other thought of answering
its challenge? There is an anticipation
of it to the point of
dying. There have been times
when, after long on my knees
in a cold chancel, a stone has rolled
from my mind, and I have looked
in and seen the old questions lie
folded and in a place
by themselves, like the piled
graveclothes of love's risen body.

Source: "The Answer" from *Frequencies* by R.S. Thomas. London: Macmillan, 1979.

Journaling:

A Better Resurrection

by Christina Rossetti

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numb'd too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimm'd with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf:
O Jesus, quicken me.
My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk:
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see:
Yet rise it shall—the sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me.
My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perish'd thing;
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King:
O Jesus, drink of me.

Source: "A Better Resurrection" from *Goblin Market and other Poems*, by Christina Rossetti. Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862.

Journaling:
