**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.

**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.


**Journaling:**

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_________________________________________________________________
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.


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.


Journaling:
Dear God,
why do I keep fighting you off?
One part of me wants you desperately,
another part of me unknowingly
pushes you back and runs away.

What is there in me that
so contradicts my desire for you?
These transition days, these passage ways,
are calling me to let go of old securities,
to give myself over into your hands.

Like Jesus who struggled with the pain
I, too, fight the "let it all be done."
Loneliness, lostness, non-belonging,
all these hurts strike out at me,
leaving me pained with this present goodbye.

I want to be more but I fight the growing.
I want to be new but I hang unto the old.
I want to live but I won’t face the dying.
I want to be whole but cannot bear
to gather up the pieces into one.

Is it that I refuse to be out of control,
to let the tears take their humbling journey,
to allow my spirit to feel its depression,
to stay with the insecurity of “no home”?

Now is the time. You call to me,
begging me to let you have my life,
inviting me to taste the darkness
so I can be filled with the light,
allowing me to lose my direction
so that I will find my way home to you.

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.


Tuesday

Beginners
by Denise Levertov
-Dedicated to the memory of Karen Silkwood and Eliot Gralla

“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.


Journaling:

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Week One: An Invitation to be Bread for Others
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.

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.


Journaling:

Saturday

What I Pray For

by Dennis O’Donnell

Sacks of rocks
I have gathered from the beach,
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?

Week Two: An Invitation to Awaken

Sunday

Prayer
by Jessica Powers

Prayer is the trap-door out of sin.
Prayer is a mystic entering in
to secret places full of light.
It is a passage through the night.
Heaven is reached, the blessed say,
by prayer and by no other way.
One may kneel down and make a plea
with words from book or breviary,
or one may enter in and find
a home-made message in the mind.
But true prayer travels further still,
to seek God’s presence and God’s will.
To pray can be to push a door
and snatch some crumbs of evermore,
or (likelier by far) to wait,
head bowed, before a fastened gate,
helpless and miserable and dumb,
yet hopeful that the Lord will come.
Here is the prayer of grace and good
most proper to our creaturehood.
God’s window shows his humble one
more to the likeness of His Son.
He sees, though thought and senses stray,
the will is resolute to stay
and feed, in weathers sweet or grim,
on any word that speaks of Him.
He beams on the humility
that keeps it peace in misery
and, save for glimmerings, never knows
how beautiful with light it grows.
He smiles on faith that seems to know
it has no other place to go.
But some day, hidden by His will,
if this meek child is waiting still,
God will take out His mercy-key
and open up felicity,
where saltiest tears are given right
to seas where sapphire marries light,
where by each woe the soul can span
new orbits for the utter man,
where even the flesh, so seldom prized,
would blind the less than divinized.

**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.  
Arches 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.


**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 heard 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 yon so for your wild card, that untamable, eternal, gut-driven ha-ha and lucky love.

**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.


**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.

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.


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.


Journaling:

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Week Three: An Invitation to Liberation

Sunday

The Bright Field
by R. S. Thomas

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.


Journaling:

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Week Three: An Invitation to Liberation

Monday

The Peace of Wild Things
by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Source: “The Peace of Wild Things” from The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry

Tuesday

The Heart of Compassion
by Joyce Rupp

Compassionate God,
your generous presence
is always attuned to hurting ones.
Your listening ear is bent
toward the cries of the wounded
Your heart of love
fills with tears for the suffering.

Turn my inward eye to see
that I am not alone.
I am a part of all of life.
Each one’s joy and sorrow
is my joy and sorrow,
and mine is theirs.
May I draw strength
from this inner communion.
May it daily recommit me
to be a compassionate presence
for all who struggle with life’s pain.


Journaling:

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**Wednesday**

**Christ Has No Body**  
by Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet of which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

**Thursday**

**Self Portrait**  
by David Whyte

It doesn’t interest me if there is one God  
or many gods.  
I want to know if you belong  
or feel abandoned.  
If you can know despair or see it in others.  
I want to know  
if you are prepared to live in the world  
with its harsh need  
to change you. If you can look back  
with firm eyes  
saying this is where I stand. I want to know  
if you know  
how to melt into that fierce heat of living,  
falling toward  
the center of your longing. I want to know  
if you are willing  
to live, day by day, with the consequences  
of love and the bitter,  
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard in that fierce embrace,  
even the gods speak of God.


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**Journaling:**

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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.

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
ward 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?

**Week Four: An Invitation to be Reconciled**

**Sunday**

**The Prodigal Son**
by Rudyard Kipling

Here come I to my own again,
Fed, forgiven and known again,
Claimed by bone of my bone again
And cheered by flesh of my flesh.
The fatted calf is dressed for me,
But the husks have greater zest for me,
I think my pigs will be best for me,
So I'm off to the Yards afresh.

I never was very refined, you see,
(And it weighs on my brother's mind, you see)
But there's no reproach among swine, d'you see,
For being a bit of a swine.
So I'm off with wallet and staff to eat
The bread that is three parts chaff to wheat,
But glory be! - there's a laugh to it,
Which isn't the case when we dine.

My father glooms and advises me,
My brother sulks and despises me,
And Mother catechises me
Till I want to go out and swear.
And, in spite of the butler's gravity,
I know that the servants have it I
Am a monster of moral depravity,
And I'm damned if I think it's fair!

I wasted my substance, I know I did,
On riotous living, so I did,
But there's nothing on record to show I did
Worse than my betters have done.
They talk of the money I spent out there -
They hint at the pace that I went out there -
But they all forget I was sent out there
Alone as a rich man's son.

So I was a mark for plunder at once,
And lost my cash (can you wonder?) at once,
But I didn't give up and knock under at once,
I worked in the Yards, for a spell,
Where I spent my nights and my days with hogs.
And shared their milk and maize with hogs,
Till, I guess, I have learned what pays with hogs
And - I have that knowledge to sell!

So back I go to my job again,
Not so easy to rob again,
Or quite so ready to sob again
On any neck that's around.
I'm leaving, Pater. Good-bye to you!
God bless you, Mater! I'll write to you!
I wouldn't be impolite to you,
But, Brother, you are a hound!


**Journaling:**

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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.

Journaling:

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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 woces 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.


Journaling:

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**Wednesday**

The Garments of God  
by Jessica Powers

God sits on a chair of darkness in my soul.  
He is God alone, supreme in His majesty.  
I sit at his feet, a child in the dark beside Him;  
my joy is aware of His glance and my sorrow is tempted  
to nest on the thought that His face is turned from me.  
He is clothed in the robes of His mercy, voluminous  
garments  
not velvet or silk and affable to the touch,  
but fabric strong for a frantic hand to clutch,  
and I hold to it fast with the fingers of my will.  
Here is my cry of faith, my deep avowal  
to the Divinity that I am dust.  
Advertisement  
Here is the loud profession of my trust.  
I will not go abroad  
to the hills of speech or the hinterlands of music  
for a crier to walk in my soul where all is still.  
I have this potent prayer through good or ill:  
here in the dark I clutch the garments of God.

**Thursday**

Am I to Lose You?  
by Louisa Sarah Bevington

‘Am I to lose you now?’ The words were light;  
You spoke them, hardly seeking a reply,  
That day I bid you quietly ‘Good-bye,’  
And sought to hide my soul away from sight.  
The question echoes, dear, through many a night, —  
My question, not your own – most wistfully;  
‘Am I to lose him?’ – asked my heart of me;  
‘Am I to lose him now, and lose him quite?’  
And only you can tell me. Do you care  
That sometimes we in quietness should stand  
As fellow-solitudes, hand firm in hand,  
And thought with thought and hope with hope compare?  
What is your answer? Mine must ever be,  
‘I greatly need your friendship: leave it me.’


Journaling:

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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.


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!

Week Five: An Invitation to Live in Faith

Sunday

And If I Did, What Then?
by George Gascoigne

“And if I did, what then?
Are you aggrieved therefore?
The sea hath fish for every man,
And what would you have more?”

Thus did my mistress once,
Amaze my mind with doubt;
And popped a question for the nonce
To beat my brains about.
Whereto I thus replied:
“Each fisherman can wish
That all the seas at every tide
Were his alone to fish.
“And so did I (in vain)
But since it may not be,
Let such fish there as find the gain,
And leave the loss for me.
“And with such luck and loss
I will content myself,
Till tides of turning time may toss
Such fishers on the shelf.
“And when they stick on sands,
That every man may see,
Then will I laugh and clap my hands,
As they do now at me.”

**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.


**Journaling:**

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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:
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.


Journaling:
Week Five: An Invitation to Live in Faith

Friday

The Avowal
by Denise Levertov

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit’s deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.


Saturday

The Observer
by Rainer Maria Rilke

I can tell a storm by the way the trees
are whipping, compared to when quiet,
against my trembling windows, and
I hear from afar things whispering
I couldn’t bear hearing without a friend
or love without a sister close by.

There moves the storm, the transforming one,
and runs through the woods and through the age,
changing it all to look ageless and young:
the landscape appears like the verse of a psalm,
so earnest, eternal, and strong.

How small is what we contend with and fight;
how great what contends with us;
if only we mirrored the moves of the things
and acquiesced to the force of the storm,
we, too, could be ageless and strong.

For what we can conquer is only the small,
and winning itself turns us into dwarfs;
but the everlasting and truly important
will never be conquered by us.

It is the angel who made himself known
to the wrestlers of the Old Testament:
for whenever he saw his opponents propose
to test their iron-clad muscle strength,
he touched them like strings of an instrument
and played their low-sounding chords.

Whoever submits to this angel,
whoever refuses to fight the fight,
comes out walking straight and great and upright,
and the hand once rigid and hard
shapes around as a gently curved guard.
No longer is winning a tempting bait.
One’s progress is to be conquered, instead,
by the ever mightier one.

Salvator Mundi: Via Crucis

by Denise Levertov

Maybe He looked indeed
much as Rembrandt envisioned Him
in those small heads that seem in fact
portraits of more than a model.
A dark, still young, very intelligent face,
a soul-mirror gaze of deep understanding, unjudging.
That face, in extremis, would have clenched its teeth
in a grimace not shown in even the great crucifixions.
The burden of humanness (I begin to see) exacted from Him
that He taste also the humiliation of dread,
cold sweat of wanting to let the whole thing go,
like any mortal hero out of his depth,
like anyone who has taken a step too far
and wants herself back.
The painters, even the greatest, don’t show how,
in the midnight Garden,
or staggering uphill under the weight of the Cross,
He went through with even the human longing
to simply cease, to not be.
Not torture of body,
not the hideous betrayals humans commit
nor the faithless weakness of friends, and surely
not the anticipation of death (not then, in agony’s grip)
was Incarnation’s heaviest weight,
but this sickened desire to renege,
to step back from what He, Who was God,
had promised Himself, and had entered
time and flesh to enact.
Sublime acceptance, to be absolute, had to have welled
up from those depths where purpose
drifted for mortal moments.

Source: “Salvator Mundi: Via Crucis” from The Stream and the Sapphire, by

Journaling:
**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 gloppy 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.


**Journaling:**

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**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:**

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**Wednesday**

**O Taste and See**
by Denise Levertov

The world is not with us enough

*O taste and see*

the subway Bible poster said,
meaning The Lord, meaning if anything all that lives
to the imagination’s tongue,
grief, mercy, language,
tangerine, weather, to breathe them, bite,
savor, chew, swallow, transform

into our flesh our
deaths, crossing the street, plum, quince,
living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking the fruit.


**Thursday: Triduum**

**Gethsemane**
By Mary Oliver

The grass never sleeps.
Or the rose.
Nor does the lily have a secret eye that shuts until morning.

Jesus said, wait with me. But the disciples slept.

The cricket has such splendid fringe on its feet,
and it sings, have you noticed, with its whole body,
and heaven knows if it even sleeps.

Jesus said, wait with me. And maybe the stars did, maybe
the wind wound itself into a silver tree, and didn’t move,
maybe
the lake far away, where once he walked as on a
blue pavement,
lay still and waited, wild awake.

Oh the dear bodies, slumped and eye-shut, that could not
keep that vigil, how they must have wept,
so utterly human, knowing this too
must be a part of the story.


**Journaling:**

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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 fisherman 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.


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:

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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.


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.


Journaling:

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