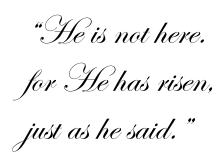
# Easter Season Poetry Companion: Poems for Prayer and Pondering

Alleluia



-Matthew 28:6

Alleluia



### How to pray with poetry

Using poetry as a companion for prayer can be a rich and engaging endeavor. Poetry as an art form uses the cadences of the spoken word, the nuances of language, the signals of punctuation and the employment of metaphors to invite the listener into participation in the unfolding of layers of meaning. Words can provide a bridge to experiences that are beyond words.

We have prepared an Easter Poetry Companion which offers an additional resource for your journey to Pentecost. This companion provides poems that can enrich and deepen the meaning of this liturgical season.

The prayers and liturgical readings of the Easter season are rich in meaning, symbolism, and prophetic themes. Poetry provides a beautiful way to explore and express these themes and probe more deeply the mystery of the resurrection.

Below are some simple suggestions for engaging poetry as a means of leading you into prayer:

- 1. Seek a quiet space where you can minimize interruptions and take a few moments to enter into the silence. Let yourself sink deeply into the quiet. Invite God in.
- 2. Read just the title of the poem and ponder what this encounter might be about.
- 3. Read the poem aloud. Pay attention to the words, the sounds, the punctuation and what you are hearing in the poem.
- 4. Now read the poem silently and slowly letting the poem reveal new truths. As you listen again notice which words or phrases catch your attention. Underline them.
- 5. Journal your thoughts or impressions:
  - What new ways of seeing or hearing are opening for you in this poem?
  - What truth do you hear in the poem that intersects with the unfolding of your life?
  - What parts of the poem call you to be present or to see in an entirely different way?

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- How does this poem reflect or resonate with your own experience? What insights does it spark?
- 6. Reread the poem once more out loud. Let the poem filter through you.
- 7. Compose your own short prayer as a response.

An Invitation to Joy and

Renewed Hope

A Poetry Companion for the Easter Season. The poems in this resource are selected to lift up the themes of resurrection, hope and new life - celebrate and reflect all the way to Pentecost.

# *"This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it."* (Ps 118:24)

This invitation to joy, which the Easter liturgy makes its own, reflects the astonishment which came over the women who, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, found the tomb empty when they went there 'very early on the first day after the Sabbath' (Mk 16:2). It is an invitation to relive in some way the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts 'burn within them' as the risen one walked with them on the road, explaining the scriptures and revealing himself in 'the breaking of the bread' (Lk 24: 32, 34). And it echoes the joy – at first uncertain and then overwhelming – which the apostles experienced on the evening of that same day, when they were visited by the risen Jesus and received the gift of his peace and of his Spirit (Jn 20: 19-23)."

-Pope John Paul II, Dies Domini



### The Death of Death

By Scott Cairns

Put fear aside. Now that He has entered into death on our behalf, all who live no longer die as men once died.

That ephemeral occasion has met its utter end. As seeds cast to the earth, we will not perish, but like those seeds shall rise again—the shroud of death itself having been burst to tatters by love's immensity. Love's Immensity: Mystics on the Endless Life, by Scott Cairns. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press. 2007. p. 14

#### Journaling:



### When Death Comes

by Mary Oliver

When death comes like the hungry bear in autumn; when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse to buy me, and snaps the purse shut; when death comes like the measle-pox when death comes like an iceberg between the shoulder blades, I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering: what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness? And therefore I look upon everything as a brotherhood and a sisterhood, and I look upon time as no more than an idea, and I consider eternity as another possibility, and I think of each life as a flower, as common as a field daisy, and as singular, and each name a comfortable music in the mouth, tending, as all music does, toward silence, and each body a lion of courage, and something precious to the earth. When it's over, I want to say all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. When it's over, I don't want to wonder if I have made of my life something particular, and real. I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument. I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

<u>Source:</u> New and Selected Poems Vol. 1, by Mary Oliver. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005 (revised edition) p. 10.

#### Journaling:





With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all.

-. Arts 4:---

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### 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.

"A Better Resurrection" is reprinted from Goblin Market and other Poems. Christina Rossetti. Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862.



### What is Hope?

by Rubem Alves - Brazilian Theologian

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, naiveté, 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.

<u>Source: Hijos de Maoana</u> (Tomorrow's Children), Rubem Alves, Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Sigueme, 1976.



#### "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. moveable and frighteningly honest world where everything began, there is a small opening into the 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

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: House of Belonging, by David Whyte. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 1996. p. 26



### At the Edge

By John O'Donohue

Sometimes, behind the lines Of words giving voice to the blue wind That blows across the amber fields Of your years, whispering the hungers Your dignity conceals, and the caves Of loss opening along shores forgotten By the ocean, you can of most hear the depth Of white silence, rising to deny everything.

<u>Source:</u> Conamara Blues, by John O'Donohue. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. p. 67

#### Journaling:



#### 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: Thirst, by Mary Oliver. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2007.

#### Journaling:

### **Thought Work**

by John O'Donohue

Off course from the frail music sought by words And the path that always claims the journey, In the pursuit of a more oblique rhythm, Creating mostly its own geography, The mind is an old crow Who knows only to gather dead twigs, Then take them back to the vacancy Between the branches of the parent tree And entwine them around the emptiness With silence and unfailing patience Until what was fallen, withered and lost Is now set to fill with dreams as a nest.

<u>Source:</u> Conamara Blues, by John O'Donohue. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. p. 2





### **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: Selected Poems Denise Levertov, by Denise Levertov, New York: New Directions, 2003. p. 137



"How depict the invisible? How picture the inconceivable? How give expression to the limitless, the immeasurable, the invisible?"

-St. John of Damascus



### Late Ripeness

by Czeslaw Milosz

Not soon, as late as the approach of my ninetieth year, I felt a door opening in me and I entered the clarity of early morning.

One after another my former lives were departing, like ships, together with their sorrow.

And the countries, cities, gardens, the bays of seas assigned to my brush came closer, ready now to be described better than they were before.

I was not separated from people, grief and pity joined us. We forget - I kept saying - that we are all children of the King.

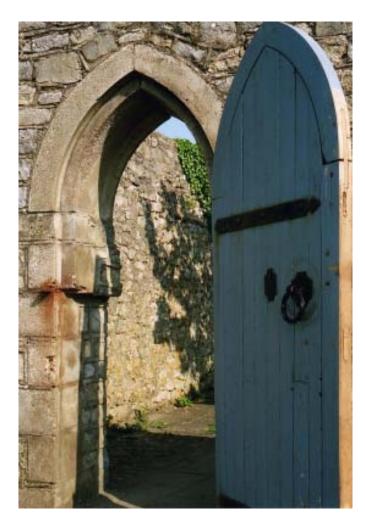
For where we come from there is no division into Yes and No, into is, was, and will be.

We were miserable, we used no more than a hundredth part of the gift we received for our long journey.

Moments from yesterday and from centuries ago a sword blow, the painting of eyelashes before a mirror of polished metal, a lethal musket shot, a caravel staving its hull against a reef - they dwell in us, waiting for a fulfillment.

I knew, always, that I would be a worker in the vineyard, as are all men and women living at the same time, whether they are aware of it or not.

Source: New and Collected Poems 1931-2001 by Czelaw Milosz. New York: Ecco, 2003.



#### Journaling:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." - In 20:19



#### Hope

By Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul, And sings the tune—without the words, And never stops at all, And sweetest in the gale is heard; And sore must be the storm That could abash the little bird That kept so many warm. I've heard it in the chillest land, And on the strangest sea; Yet, never, in extremity, It asked a crumb of me.

Source: The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, by Emily Dickenson, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924.

#### Journaling:



### Optimism

by Jane Hirshfeld

More and more I have come to admire resilience. Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side, it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true. But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers, mitochondria, figs — all this resinous, unretractable earth.

Source: Given Sugar, Given Salt: Poems, by Jane Hirshfeld, New York: Harper Perennial, 2002. p. 71

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, for the Almighty has done great things for me." -Quke 1:46.49



#### Ten Years Later

By David Whyte

When the mind is clear and the surface of the now still, now swaying water

slaps against the rolling kayak,

I find myself near darkness, paddling again to yellow Island.

Every spring wildflowers cover the grey rocks.

Every year the sea breeze ruffles the cold and lovely pearls hidden in the center of the flowers

as if remembering them by touch alone.

A calm and lonely, trembling beauty that frightened me in youth.

Now their loneliness feels familiar, one small thing I've learned these years,

how to be alone, and at the edge of aloneness how to be found by the world.

Innocence is what we allow to be gifted back to us once we've given ourselves away.

There is one world only, the one to which we gave ourselves utterly, and to which one day

we are blessed to return.

Source: House of Belonging, by David Whyte. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 1996. p. 51



#### Journaling:



#### The Swan

by Mary Oliver

Did you too see it, drifting, all night, on the black river? Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery air -An armful of white blossoms, A perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned into the bondage of its wings; a snowbank, a bank of lilies, Biting the air with its black beak? Did you hear it, fluting and whistling A shrill dark music - like the rain pelting the trees - like a waterfall Knifing down the black ledges? And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds -A white cross Streaming across the sky, its feet Like black leaves, its wings Like the stretching light of the river? And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything? And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for? And have you changed your life?

Source: The Swan, by Mary Oliver, The Paris Review #124, Fall, 1992.

#### Journaling:



#### **Reunion** By Scott Cairns

You know already that the breath moves in and out in order to infuse the heart with the air it craves; as I have said, then recollect your mind, and draw it—and yes, I am speaking of your mind as if you drew it *in* through your very nostrils. Attend to its descent, as it finds the path to reach the heart. Drive it then, and force it downward with the very air you breathe to enter with a rush into that famished, pulsing chamber.

When it arrives, you will taste the joy that follows. You'll have nothing to regret. Just as a man who has been far from home a long time cannot restrain his delight at seeing his wife and children just so, the spirit overflows with joy and with unspeakable delight when it is once more united with the soul.

Source: Love's Immensity: Mystics on the Endless Life, by Scott Cairns. Brewster, MA:Paraclete Press, 2007. p. 91

Then Jesus said to them, "Mhy are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." -Qk 24:-8

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#### "Still Movement"

(Motets I-V for Pentecost Sunday) By Murray Bodo

You have gone the way you came burning in and out of the dark.

My eye searches for a horizon to free my mind from prison.

The day, gray with backward growing, the sun rising at sunset.

And you return the way you left, a crack of light happening:

Out of the dry, barren heart the shoot of something green.

<u>Source:</u> The Earth Moves at Midnight and Other Poems, by Murray Bodo, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003. p. 56.

### God's Love

by Scott Cairns

O Holy Spirit, Who breathes where You will, breathe into me and draw me to Yourself.

Invest the nature You have shaped, with gifts so flowing with honey that, from intense joy in Your sweetness

this clay might turn from lesser things, that it may accept (as You give them) spiritual gifts, and through pleasing

jubilation, it may melt, entirely, in holy love, reaching finally out to touch the Uncreated Light.

<u>Source:</u> Love's Immensity: Mystics on the Endless Life, by Scott Cairns. Brewster, MA:Paraclete Press, 2007. p. 105



Ann Chapin, "The Descent of the Holy Spirit"



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