
GANZ – SIXTH MEDITATION FOR LENT 2025



The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (1617)¹ by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) in the Indianapolis Museum of Art

¹ To be able to zoom in on this painting, go to:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Entry_of_Christ_into_Jerusalem_by_Anthony_van_Dyck.jpg

Daniel Berrigan, SJ (1921-2016)² - “Our options [in a tremulous³ world], as they say, are no longer large. ... [We] may choose to do nothing, which is to say, to go discreetly or wildly mad, letting fear possess us and frivolity rule our days. Or we may, along with admirable spirits like Denise Levertov, *be driven sane*; by community, by conscience, by treading the human crucible⁴.”

Psalm 27 (NJB) -

¹ Yahweh is my light and my salvation,
whom should I fear?
Yahweh is the fortress of my life,
whom should I dread? ⁵

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Farthest Shore*, Chapter 13 - “He was the prince [Arren]. But in the old stories, that was the beginning; and this seemed to be the end. He was not downcast. Though very tired, and grieving for his companion [Ged, the Archmage, his mentor], he felt not the least bitterness or regret. Only there was no longer anything he could do. It had all been done. ... In his tunic pocket was a hard, sharp-edged thing. He drew it forth and looked at it, puzzled. It was a small stone, black, porous, hard. He almost tossed it away. Then he felt the edges of it in his hand, rough and searing, and felt the weight of it, and knew it for what it was: a bit of rock from the Mountains of Pain. It had caught in his pocket as he climbed or when he crawled to the edge of the pass with Ged. He held it in his hand, the unchanging thing, the stone of Pain. He closed his hand on it and held it. And he smiled then, a smile both somber and joyous, knowing, for the first time in his life, alone, unpraised, and at the end of the world, victory.

² *Britannica* - **Daniel Joseph Berrigan, SJ (1921-2016)** - Daniel Berrigan (born May 9, 1921, Virginia, Minnesota, U.S. — died April 30, 2016, Bronx, New York) was an American writer, Roman Catholic (Jesuit) priest, and antiwar activist whose poems and essays reflect his deep commitment to social, political, and economic change in American society. ... His earliest works are compared to the devotional poems of John Donne and George Herbert. *Time Without Number* (1957) is praised for its unique voice, its skillful use of theological imagery, and its exploration of spirituality.

³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**tremulous**” - **1.a. - 1611** - Of persons, their limbs, etc.: Characterized or affected by trembling or quivering from nervous agitation or weakness, of mental or physical origin; hence, fearful, timorous.

⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**crucible**” - **1.a. - a1475** - A vessel, usually of earthenware, made to endure great heat, used for fusing metals, etc.; a melting-pot.

⁵ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ps 27:1.

Scripture – Luke 19:28-40 –

³⁵ So they took the colt to Jesus and, throwing their cloaks on its back, they lifted Jesus on to it. ³⁶ As he moved off, they spread their cloaks in the road, ³⁷ and now, **as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives**, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen.⁶

Jesus, riding atop that famous donkey⁷, and His disciples walking, advanced along the road from Bethany,⁸ traveling toward Jerusalem, coming out of the east like the sun rising over the ancient city.

2 Peter (NJB): ¹⁹ So we have confirmation of the words of the prophets; and you will be right to pay attention to it as to a lamp for lighting a way through the dark, *until the dawn comes, and the morning star rises in your minds.*⁹

Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965)¹⁰, “People Look East” –

People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.

⁶ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Lk 19:35–37.

⁷ See G.K. Chesterton’s poem about that particular donkey at:
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47918/the-donkey>.

⁸ <https://shreddingtheveil.org/2023/07/15/the-mountain-of-olives-part-ii-the-terrain/> - “The main point to consider is that the terrain all around Jerusalem is very rough terrain, with high hills, and deep ravines. Travelers were challenged by this terrain, with the constant up and down of all the paths through these mountains and hills.”

⁹ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 2 Pe 1:19.

¹⁰ At *Your Daily Poem* website: **Eleanor Farjeon (1881 - 1965)** was an award-winning English author of primarily children's literature. Born into a literary family (her parents and siblings were all writers, except for one brother who was a composer), "Nellie," as she was called, started writing when she was a child. She was friends with many leading authors of her time, including D.H. Lawrence and Robert Frost. Though Eleanor produced a tremendous amount of work--more than eighty books of children's stories and poems, adult novels, and other work, plus numerous school plays--her best known creations are the poem, "Morning Has Broken," made popular in the song by Cat Stevens, and this poem, "People Look East," which someone paired up with an old French melody to create a Christmas carol that first appeared in 1928.

People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.

Reaching the summit of the Mount of Olives (elev. 2,652 feet)¹¹, they saw before them Jerusalem (elev. 2,575 feet) sitting atop a ridge across the Kidron Valley. From there the road descended steeply to the floor of the Kidron Valley, lying a little over 600 feet below them (elev. 2,035 feet). (Jesus would in a few days cross this valley from Jerusalem to get to the base of the Mount of Olives where the garden called Gethsemane lay [e.g., John 18:1]).

Jeremiah included the Kidron within the area holy to the Lord (31:39–40)¹². In later times the central part of the valley was called the Valley of Jehoshaphat *and was assumed to be the place where the dead were resurrected*.¹³

I had not noticed before that as Jesus proceeded toward Jerusalem, *He first descended*, as if into the realm of the dead, to the bottom of the Kidron Valley (“the place where the dead were resurrected”) *before His steep ascent* up and into Jerusalem.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the verb “**to harrow**” – *transitive*. To harry, rob, spoil. **1. a. - Old English** – Used especially in the phrase **to harrow hell**, said of Christ.

It is as if this “triumphal procession” that the Church calls “Palm Sunday”, which commenced when Jesus and His disciples began their descent down the western side of

¹¹ *Britannica* at “**Mount of Olives**” – The Mount of Olives is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. From it Jesus entered Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of his life (Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1). Two days before the Crucifixion, in his so-called Olivet Discourse, he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21). **The traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed just before he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26; Mark 14), is on the western slopes. Finally, after the Resurrection, Jesus is reported to have ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9–12); Luke mentions that the Ascension occurred on a location there near the village of Bethany (Luke 24:50–51).**

¹² **Jeremiah 31:** ⁴⁰ And the whole valley, with its corpses and ashes, and all the ground beside the ravine of the Kidron as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, eastwards, will be consecrated to Yahweh. It will never be destroyed or demolished again.

¹³ See: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kidron>.

the Mount of Olives, *prefigured* what would become known as the “harrowing of Hell” – the central mystery of Holy Saturday¹⁴ - referenced in the *Apostles’ Creed*.¹⁵

A Poem: “Ikona: The Harrowing of Hell”¹⁶ in Denise Levertov, *A Door in the Hive* (1989)

Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, page 1178-79 – “The word *limbo* is derived from the Latin *limbus* (“border”). It is the state or place, according to some, reserved for the dead who deserved neither the beatific vision nor eternal punishment. The *limbus patrum* (“limbo of the fathers”; i.e., all the lovers of God in the long ages before the birth of Christ), containing the pre-Christian just who had to await the opening of heaven by Christ (Luke 16: 22; 1 Peter 3: 18–22), was distinguished from the *limbus puerorum*, containing unbaptized infants and children, who therefore remained in Original Sin without ever incurring any actual sins. The concept of *limbus patrum* was probably a Christian adaptation of the Hebrew notion of *Sheol* (Luke 16: 19–31). The concept of *limbus puerorum* was originated by the Pelagians,¹⁷ whose theology of Original Sin

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar has explored at considerable depth the meaning of Holy Saturday in his book, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (1969): “**To be sure, one can, as the Eastern Church customarily does, see the decisive image of the redemption in the *descensus*, that is, in the breaking down of Hell’s gates and the liberation of the prisoners.** Times innumerable the icon-painters depicted that scene, the true Easter image of the East. Here the entire work of the *Triduum Mortis* is perceived as a single movement which on Holy Saturday reaches its supreme dramatic intensity. **Whereas the Western images of Easter always show the risen Christ alone, the East makes us see the soteriological and social aspect of the redemptive work.**” [Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 179–180.]

¹⁵ The Apostles’ Creed reads: “was crucified, dead and buried, *descended to hell* (*descendit ad inferna*), on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, ...” “Next to the Constantinopolitan Creed, the most important confessional formulary in Christendom is the so-called Apostles’ Creed. ... In the twentieth century its prestige has been enhanced and extended by its acknowledgement by several ecumenical gatherings as a uniquely authoritative statement of Christian belief.” [J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 368.]

¹⁶ A note from the great scholar of the Creeds, **J.N.D. Kelly** – “The belief that Christ spent the interval between His expiry on the cross and His resurrection in the underworld was a commonplace of Christian teaching from the earliest times. Apart from the possibility of its having been in the minds of New Testament writers, the Descent was explicitly mentioned by St Ignatius, St Polycarp, St Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others. According to one strain of patristic exegesis, the Lord Himself had hinted at it in His prophecy (Mt. 12:39 f.) that the Son of Man would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς).”

¹⁷ *Britannica*: **Pelagius (born c. 354, probably Britain – died after 418, possibly Palestine)** was a monk and theologian whose heterodox theological system known as Pelagianism emphasized *the primacy of human effort in spiritual salvation*. Also, the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: “**Pelagianism** received its name from Pelagius and designates a heresy of the fifth century, which denied original sin as well as Christian grace.

envisioned no guilt in unbaptized children. Consequently, they could not [because they lacked Baptism] be consigned to Hell. ... With the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the theological climate it reflected and sanctioned, however, the idea of *limbo* has seemed less and less tenable in light of the universal offer of grace from the very beginning of each person's existence."

Down through the tomb's inward arch
He has shouldered out into Limbo
to gather them, dazed, from dreamless slumber:
the merciful dead, the prophets,
the innocents just His own age and those
unnumbered others waiting here
unaware, in an endless void He is ending
now, stooping to tug at their hands,
to pull them from their sarcophagi,¹⁸
dazzled, almost unwilling. Dismas,¹⁹
neighbor in death, Golgotha²⁰ dust
still streaked on the dried sweat of his body
no one had washed and anointed, is here,
for sequence is not known in Limbo;

... Besides, at that time, the doctrine of Christian grace was everywhere vague and undefined; even the West was convinced of nothing more than that some sort of assistance was necessary to salvation and was given gratuitously, while the nature of this assistance was but little understood. In the East, moreover, as an offset to widespread fatalism, the moral power and freedom of the will were at times very strongly or even too strongly insisted on *assisting* grace being spoken of more frequently than *preventing* grace (see GRACE). It was due to the intervention of St. Augustine and the Church, that greater clearness was gradually reached in the disputed questions and that the first impulse was given towards a more careful development of the dogmas of original sin and grace." [Joseph Pohle, "**Pelagius and Pelagianism**," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York: The Encyclopedia Press; The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1907-1913) I:-XV.]

¹⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "*sarcophagus*" - **1. - 1601** - A kind of stone reputed among the Greeks to have the property of consuming the flesh of dead bodies deposited in it and consequently used for coffins. *Obsolete exc. Ancient History*.

¹⁹ *Wikipedia*: "In apocryphal writings, the impenitent thief is given the name **Gestas**, which first appears in the Gospel of Nicodemus, while his companion is called Dismas. Christian tradition holds that Gestas was on the cross to the left of Jesus, and **Dismas - "the good thief"** - was on the cross to the right of Jesus."

²⁰ Luke calls the place of Christ's crucifixion simply "Skull" (*Kranion* [Κρανιον]; 23:33), whereas the three other evangelists give both this Greek name and its Semitic equivalent Golgotha. Matthew (27:33) and Mark (15:22) give the Greek name "Skull Place" (*Kraniou Topos* Κρανιου Τόπος) first and then the translation Golgotha. [Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "**Golgotha**," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006-2009) 624.]

the promise, given from cross to cross
at noon, arches beyond sunset and dawn.
All these He will swiftly lead
to the Paradise road: *they are safe*.
That done, there must take place that struggle
no human presumes to picture:
living, dying, descending to rescue the just
from shadow, were lesser travails
than this: to break
through earth and stone of the faithless world
back to the cold sepulchre,²¹ tear-stained
stifling shroud; to break from *them*
back into breath and heartbeat, and walk
the world again, closed into days and weeks again,
wounds of His anguish open, and Spirit
streaming through every cell of flesh
so that if mortal sight could bear
to perceive it, it would be seen
His mortal flesh was lit from within, now,
and aching for home. He must return,
first, in Divine patience, and know
hunger again, and give
to humble friends the joy
of giving Him food – fish and a honeycomb.

The Poem: Observations and Insights –

Down through the tomb's inward arch / He has shouldered out into Limbo – It is valuable to pay attention to spatial references in one's spiritual understanding. We deploy "locations" to *visualize* realities that are only accessible to our *understanding*, not to our *sight*. So, we speak of Hell as being "down" and Heaven as "up". But there are widely attested traditions that the damned or the spiritually lost float in the air of our world, wandering unseen to our eyes – floating neither "down" where we stand nor "up" in Heaven but in-between. Recall all those "spirits of the air" that the Ghost of Marley sees floating in miserable congregation outside of Scrooge's window. But the poet's use of the visual metaphor of "down" activates in our imagination a *realm* of the Dead into which Christ "shoulders" His way, passing through the rock upon which His crucified and buried body lay.

²¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**sepulchre**" – **1.a. - c1200** – A tomb or burial-place, a building, vault, or excavation, made for the interment of a human body. Now only *rhetorical* or *Historical*.

To gather them ... / unnumbered others waiting here / unaware, in an endless void
He is ending now – An unmistakable sign that the Christ descends in the Holy Spirit is that His appearance in the realm of the Dead had the effect of *gathering* them. In a realm without hope, of people who no longer dream, who wander unaware, there is only intense loneliness, each person disconnected, incapable of friendship, lost in vagueness. When Christ comes among them, they *gather*!

²¹ May they all be one,
just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you,
so that they also may be in us,
so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.²²

All these He will swiftly lead / to the Paradise road: they are safe – The adverb “swiftly” highlights the overwhelming competence of the Christ to be redemptively effective, but not without showing the divine courtesy – “stooping to tug at their hands, / to pull them from their sarcophagi, / dazzled, almost unwilling”. Something so sweet in Christ’s “stooping” and “tugging”. He is hands-on; up-close ... as He always was in His earthly ministry, touching even lepers. The clause “they are safe” has a distinctly “motherly” feel to it. And, “the Paradise road” highlights a theological tradition that when we die with a life “worthy” of Heaven, we do not go to Heaven (yet) but to Paradise – **Luke 23:** ⁴³ He [Jesus] answered him [Dismas, the good thief, referenced in the poem], ‘In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’²³. The dead are still needing to wait for Heaven until after the Final Judgment.

To break / through earth and stone of the faithless world – The poet at this point begins to break through to an exceptional insight about what it must have felt like to the Risen Christ *to have to come back* among us on Earth. Perhaps it did not feel good. At least those who dwelt in the realm of the Dead, at least *they*, unlike the living, were no longer harming each other, holding grudges, or coveting; they were no longer vying for power or “ghosting” people; they were no longer ravaging and despoiling the natural world; they were now done with travail and struggle.

1 Peter 5 (NJB): ⁸ Keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a *roaring lion*, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Stand up to him, strong in faith and in the knowledge that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of your brothers and sisters throughout the world is undergoing.

¹⁰ **You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace who called**

²² [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Jn 17:21.

²³ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Lk 23:43.

you to eternal glory in Christ will restore you, he will confirm, strengthen and support you. ¹¹ His power lasts for ever and ever. Amen.²⁴

The poet makes us consider that it is perhaps *our* world, and we who live in it, that is the “Hell” that Christ “harrowed” when He returned among us as our Risen Lord:

to break from *them*
back into breath and heartbeat, and walk
the world again, closed into days and weeks again,
wounds of His anguish open, and Spirit
streaming through every cell of flesh
so that if mortal sight could bear
to perceive it, it would be seen
His mortal flesh was lit from within, now,
and aching for home. He must return,
first, in Divine patience, ...

My goodness those are gorgeous lines of poetry and of startling contemplative insight!

Prayer: “Almighty ever-living God, who as an example of humility for the human race to follow caused our Savior to take flesh and submit to the Cross, graciously grant that we may heed his lesson of patient suffering and so merit a share in his Resurrection.”

²⁴ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 1 Pe 5:8–11.