

## Until a Certain Friday in Jerusalem...

These past days on my hospital bed,  
I have been thinking a lot about unemployment,  
inflation, and the misery they breed.  
Naturally, I turned my thoughts to  
the gulag and the gas chambers,  
the imprisonment of dissidents in insane asylums,  
the confinement of priests in camps in Rumania,  
which these eyes of mine have seen, actually seen,  
and Pinochet's torturings, the re-embarkations in Vietnam,  
the disembarkations in Angola.  
The degree of injustice may vary, but the cause is the same:  
ignorance driving people to despise human beings.

Looking back over it all,  
looking back on what the world must go through,  
which is shown to us in a nutshell  
on T.V., in the newspapers,  
I thought that this has been the destiny  
and condition of humanity  
from generation to generation  
from one civilization to another,  
experienced as an inescapable fate,  
until a certain Friday in Jerusalem.

I thought that most people throughout time  
have despised the lives and honor  
of the poor and the downcast.  
So it was with the poor man  
whose wife had just been killed in an accident.  
He was just echoing what everyone had taught him when he said,  
"Well, that's one less bitch on earth!"  
He repeated the lesson learned by heart,  
he too forgetting that his wife was the mother of nine children,  
two of them his own,  
forgetting that those nine children  
would be deprived of tenderness  
and would always miss  
their mother's sleepless nights and careworn days.

I thought this is what humanity had always been from age to age,  
until that Friday in Jerusalem.  
Because this poor man's words mimicked those  
that rose up to insult and dishonor the slaves of old,  
to oppress the millions of poor since the dawn of time.  
And I wondered what inexorable fate  
drives some people to this point.  
How can they instill  
so much fear and anguish in other people's hearts,  
so much misery in their lives, so much loss,  
so many ruptures, so many tears and sorrows?

How can people reach this point,  
where they pile up so many nameless and disgraced victims?

I understood that humanity's shame had been  
always being forced to steal the lives  
of the poor and the downcast, to steal their liberty,  
to create the injustice that keeps them from loving,  
from understanding, from deciding and sharing.  
I understood how some people had been dragged so low  
as to take or to steal life, liberty, justice, and truth  
until a certain Friday in Jerusalem.

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Because on that day,  
a man whose name was above every name,  
rose up before all humanity to lay down his life  
in protest and refusal  
of humanity's pervasive wickedness,  
of the inevitability of war, prison, torture,  
of lies and fear.

This man, in any event, had already prepared his death,  
even before that Friday in Jerusalem.  
Because he wanted his condition in life to be an exact replica  
of that of the poor and the downtrodden.  
Even before that Friday in Jerusalem,  
he had freely chosen to live  
and to die among these people.

In fact, from his first breath,  
he had identified with these hordes,  
these crowds of faceless human beings,  
these famished, these ragged,  
these restless, these insecure masses,  
the people in the gas chambers and the gulags  
of yesterday and today,  
the unemployed, and the homeless,  
to call for communion between all people,  
to ensure the restitution of life  
to the poor and the downcast.

Travelling like them, from place to place, from town to town,  
he had been shoved about by some, imprisoned by others,  
exploited and used by all.

He was and still is  
the man with no stone on which to lay his head,  
with nothing solid on which to set his feet,  
wandering and pursued like the very poor,  
forced to jeopardize his life with this people.  
He was accused of enjoying their company, and he did.

He was accused of being like them,  
of consorting with robbers,  
prostitutes, criminals, low-lifers,  
accused of mixing with the crowd,  
of losing himself among this people of beggars  
who are leaderless, aimless, pointless, loveless and godless.

Courted by politicians  
by power brokers and master minds,  
he refused to compromise himself  
so as to keep the full measure of his human dignity and freedom.  
He felt anguish over tomorrow's uncertainties.  
Still, the resourcefulness of his mother Mary sustained him  
and his friends along the way.  
Laid low in the midst of the crowds,  
he was raised high like a hangman  
so that the poor, by breaking away from him,  
would strip him of his reason to exist.

But even before that Friday in Jerusalem,  
he was treated as a rabble-rouser, an imposter, a trouble-maker.  
The elite presented him as a public danger  
to those who compromised themselves with him.  
They likened him to Beelzebub, spoke of him as the son of Beelzebub  
so that even if he raised the dead with his love,  
he would still be misunderstood, crushed, defeated.  
Like this, he was put in the same position as the poor,  
as all the poor and downtrodden, who, in spite of everything,  
give new life to their children each day,  
thanks to their determination to share the love that still remains,  
despite the world's attempts to tear it from them.

But isn't all this ridiculous,  
so ridiculous, his miracle, his patience, his tenderness?  
What good would it do the economy,  
society, politics, or even religion?

On the eve of that Friday outside Jerusalem,  
in the loneliness and anguish of Gethsemane,  
he was steeped in a cold sweat,  
bathed in the blood he perspired,  
frozen with fear for his loved ones, for their lives.  
May they not be killed, may they be left in peace,  
May the lives of his own be spared!  
Gethsemane, the betrayal of a people,  
the betrayal of the poor!  
The friends who can no longer bear such burdens,  
nor endure so much,  
the friends who betray and denounce,  
thus hoping to free themselves at last.

The hordes in the gas chambers, the gulags,

tortured by Pinochet, confined in Rumania,  
the unemployed and the crushed! Why?  
Why, in spite of it all,  
does the human race still have a bad conscience  
when your existence is denounced?  
Why do people feel guilty about you,  
offended in their honor,  
responsible for your every breath, even your death?  
Why does humanity refuse that you become just a rotting carcass,  
even if its guiding lights in thought and deed  
declare that you are nothing, that you have become merely a number?  
How to explain that, in humanity's eyes,  
you are, remain and always will be human beings?

Isn't it because two thousand years ago,  
one Friday in Jerusalem, a man--  
the son of God for believers--  
Isn't it because to this very day,  
this man, Jesus Christ, encompassed and encompasses  
everything you are,  
all the shame and anguish you experience?  
So that the Father, for evermore,  
will experience your poverty and despair  
like a thorn in his divinity,  
and will never be able to forget it?

Isn't it because two thousand years ago,  
one Friday in Jerusalem, a man--  
a prophet or leader for non-believers--  
forced all people, by encountering you,  
to refuse the inevitability of unemployment,  
inflation, gulags and gas chambers, insane asylums,  
isolation chambers, and torture...  
So that humanity would fulfill the before and after  
of that Friday in Jerusalem.  
So that all people,  
by identifying with the poor and the downtrodden,  
would encompass in their lives and deaths  
liberty, justice, and truth.

I thought to myself that people of every era  
have crushed, despised, and robbed  
the lives and honor of the poor and downtrodden  
through ignorance of human nature.  
From age to age, it was seen as inevitable  
until one Friday,  
until that Friday in Jerusalem,  
when a man rose up before all humanity  
to protest and refuse at the cost of his life.  
He had freely chosen  
to live and die as the poor and downtrodden do,  
like them misunderstood, trampled on, defeated,

so that the Father might never forget,  
so that the human race might stop accepting as unavoidable  
their despair and humiliation.

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