

Basilica

The sun is different here, lower in the sky,
Brighter, suffusing the square with an almost
Beneficent glow. The mass of people crowding the square,
The mumbled prayers, the tear-stained cheeks,
Animals gathered together with that great surging mass
Of creation, huddled together, outside the Basilica.

Near the street an old woman, knees bleeding, humbly crawls
Her pilgrimage to the Church. Her tattered garments, worn shoes,
And faded shawl cannot contain the divinity within her that seeks to
Escape, as she silently prays her rosary on the completion
Of the three-mile pilgrimage, ending at the square.

Inside, the people crowd together as they gaze with
Rapt devotion towards a shawl that hangs from the ceiling,
Preserved, against logic, against decay, these four
Hundred years; and looking up into the dazzling light,
You feel the presence of something beyond words.

The people file out, awash in tears admixed with smiles;
They mumble to themselves and stare heavenward in
The humbled realization that something has happened,
And that they will never be the same.

The murmurs do not matter: a smile can say more than any
Language, any word could ever say. Wander around aimlessly
Transfixed by a vision; who knows how long? Drift over to help
An old lady take a seat on a bench near the side of the Church.
The realization comes that you saw her earlier, crawling her way up
the cobble-stone street at the end of her pilgrimage beside the Church.

It is then that you hope more fervently than you have ever hoped
Before, that God is merciful and judges with the same compassion
That shines in the eyes of that old lady. For her toothless smile
Seems to say that she has everything she needs: while you, a
Successful business man stand before her, emptied; and yet somehow
Filled with a great, gnawing, indefinable fear.