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# Gospel Reflection Poems

**Notes on the poem “Christ is Risen and He Walks”**

*Art Laffin*

This poem is not dated and it is not known where Anne wrote it. One thing is known: she truly believed in the risen Christ. She sought, as her good friend Dan Berrigan put it, to “taste” and “test the resurrection in our bones.”<sup>7</sup> Her understanding of Resurrection, borne out of prayer, service and resistance, is reflected in her invocation of how Jesus is present in our midst, in each fragile moment.

## Christ is Risen and He Walks

Christ is risen and he walks  
within walled space and time –  
each fragile moment  
flickering and hoping for the next to break  
through the glass and hold the hand  
of eternity.

Christ is risen and his word  
waits in all withinness  
welcoming each unsaid,  
uncertain, unfinal, unframed  
phrase, broken in the middle,  
but open to meaning.

Christ is risen and his presence  
grasps the fluid shifting matter  
of our being here at all  
to walk with it and rest his head  
nowhere – but everywhere, all over,  
under and over.

Christ is risen and his face

comes and goes, but now I –

don't know – I know –

Galilee is history – but not they and we:

women, friends – faithful, faithless – untombed,

untimed.

## Palm Sunday, 1969

We tore the branches from the trees and sang  
as though the streets could know no other sound,  
and yet from every alley beggars called;  
lost children sobbed their emptiness;  
slaves screamed in pain,  
and old men died  
alone.

We danced the dust into a hovering cloud –  
the stones would cry out only later  
in the echo of our fear that,  
for comfort, not kingship but Godhead had come too near –  
but not for comforting  
the living lost  
and dead.

You who enter every gate of love and pain,  
come back;  
slide off the ass's back once more,  
and, falling three times, clutch our passive dust –  
breathe blood –  
then, struggling,  
rise again.

**Notes on the poem "Brothers"***Carole Sargent*

During Anne Montgomery's discernment to become a Catholic sister, the mother superior told her that they wanted her to experience life and at least earn a college degree. She chose to travel around Canada, sometimes taking the train between New York and the West Coast via a scenic Canadian route. Her brother, who was still in high school, supported her emotionally at this time. Later he enrolled in the U.S. Naval Academy with the goal of becoming a Navy pilot and serving in World War II. His name was Brooke, although his fellow pilots sometimes knew him by the nickname Monty.

Brooke and Anne absolutely loved and cared for each other. She'd share many stories about her brother with her friend and lawyer Blake Kremer, one after the other, remembering all the little adventures they had as kids growing up.<sup>8</sup> Once they lived in Coronado, California, near San Diego Bay. While her father went yet again to sea during World War II, she and Brooke had bought a little sail boat that you could also manually row so they could have some naval adventures themselves. It was in terrible shape and was always sinking, but nevertheless they would try to go out to sea in it together. It was Brooke's job to sail, and Anne's to bail as quickly as she could. They would spend whole afternoons sailing around like that, having the greatest adventures. They would fish off the side and bring the catch back to their mother, who would poach the fish to make beautiful meals.

When Anne Montgomery was dying, she had a selection of just a few pictures around her, next to her, on her bed. One of these was her brother Brooke, looking like a 1950s Hollywood movie star. He had chiseled, handsome features and a big, warm smile. The story behind that photo was the cause of great mirth in her family. Brooke had finally achieved his goal of becoming a naval pilot, but he was technically the class of 1946. Because of the buildup of the war in 1945 his class graduated early to join the action, but he was commissioned just as V-J Day was announced. Determined to at least see the Pacific theater that his father had known so well, about a week after the war ended he got permission to fly out and land on the deck of an American aircraft carrier in the Pacific. When he



landed, however, he realized that he had made a terrible mistake. He was on a Japanese aircraft carrier!

Given that it was now peacetime, the captain of the carrier radioed his captain and said, "One of your pilots has mistakenly landed on our ship. What should I do?"

The American commander radioed back and said, "Don't let him go until he writes a poem."

He did this, and then was granted permission to fly back. As he landed on his carrier, he saw everyone standing at attention on deck in their dress whites. A band played. After all, he had made history. Brooke "Monty" Montgomery was the first pilot ever to actually land on a Japanese carrier, albeit after this whole, horrible war had ended, and the only one to return safely as well. The crew saluted him (surely at his merciless expense), the band performed, and as he stepped down the ladder from his plane in the uproar, someone snapped the smiling photo that Sister Anne had at her bedside when she lay dying. "He's got the best smile on his face," remembers Kremer. "It's embarrassed and humiliated and happy."

Anne Montgomery finished college at Manhattanville, the College of the Sacred Heart, and she was invited to join the RSCJ order in 1948, making her first profession in 1951. Then in 1956 she went to Rome to prepare for her final vows. Part of this involved a long silent retreat of more than a month, as we saw earlier in this book. It was during this retreat in early February that she was brought to a superior's office and told, "Your brother just died in an airplane crash." He had died on February 1, 1956. After this she was expected to return to that silence. She was in Italy, far from her family. "It was incredibly painful for her that she couldn't talk with her parents," Kremer said, "and that she couldn't be there to mourn her brother with other people who cared about him. That was a pain that she carried to the end of her life." He was 28 by then, and the crash happened when two fighter planes collided at 40,000 feet near Ventura, California during a target practice run. The cause was determined to be pilot error. The other young pilot survived.

It would be inaccurate to read this poem about brothers as *necessarily* being about Brooke Montgomery. It might not have been. But knowing about the tragedy does offer a sense of its possible valences for her.

## Brothers

I dreamt I held a husk –  
but that was my brother;  
his hunger  
drained my soul  
to what ours is: a  
longing.

Where he had walked I could not  
follow:  
to drink the wine of wonder,  
to feast on fire –  
but dance whirlpooled to stillness,  
and quenched its flames in darkness.

For what he – prodigal – had spent,  
I clutch to close the crevices of an empty house,  
the sterile farmer of furrows ruled on a fertile earth,  
blossoming the lambs I fence,  
bursting with grapes I grasp to crush,  
lest their joy unfold my fingers.

And so I find you in my house,  
called here by our father,  
to steal and squander the very self I  
saved:  
a stranger, my soul's brother,  
prodigal of all I hold to profit heaven.

The calf is killed,  
fattened for the bride I could not love,  
and my bones, shaken by the wind,  
rise with its whisper.  
Through falling leaves and fallow vineyards I walk the world,  
a beggar,  
bound for a country far,  
and home to find my brother.

## Andrew

People were always trying to  
see; running,  
climbing trees,  
lifting children high  
above the crowding,

and that day – as usual –  
they came to me.

I was always the go-between:  
first for Peter,  
this time for Philip and his friends.

And then  
on that minute,  
that hour,  
the world turned round,  
for the hour was now –  
as it was that first time when

He  
turned and said,  
“Come and see.”

I have been coming ever since,  
but now – then – always

He is the One  
coming,  
lifted up  
for all to see.

And I Lord?

but  
you said  
“Follow me.”

## Zacchaeus

Curious or crazy,

I climbed

and lay clinging,

caught in the clouds that cluttered

the sky of any mind,

the leaves dancing, taunting with veined,

hypnotic hands

the foolish fancy

that I could see.

Dizzy to dreaming, my eyes are

drawn down to a world

whirled

in madness,

its still center a tree,

roots serpent-coiled and

tearing

a cave – dark to its core.

Poised at the plunge,

I am caught by a cry:

Come down –

quickly come down –

I would stay with you today,

stoop to enter the door

of your flesh

Steep the way and narrow

between pride

and

passion,

fire and

water;

one must pass

alone

and so we go

together.

## Mary

I brought her home with me –

Wisdom –

and waited,

patient at her door,

with the passion of those who wait

empty,

my soul a mirror

crystalled

in the waters of creation,

spirit stirred until

ripples,

crossing and splintering the image,

made him seem like

everyman –

timeless yet

coming daily,

untouched but

closed in the man-made temples

of this world.



And now I understood  
that the outcasts  
and the prostitutes  
come first.

So I said:  
Behold me, bound,  
the servant of  
each one.