

Text to

The Quarry

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[The poem 'The Quarry' is from a collection of poems called *Easter Vigil and Other Poems* by Karol Wojtyla, translated to English from the original Polish by Jerzy Peterkiewicz, and published in 1979. The poem is in four major parts, with titles, and three of those parts are divided further into numbered sections with no titles. (Copyright 2009 Hutchinson Publishing Group, Ltd.)]

THE QUARRY

I. Material

1.

Listen: the even knocking of hammers,
so much their own,
I project on to the people
to test the strength of each blow.
Listen now: electric current
cuts through a river of rock.
And a thought grows in me day after day:
the greatness of work is inside man.

Hard and cracked
his hand is differently charged
by the hammer
and thought differently unravels in stone
as human energy splits from the strength of stone
cutting the bloodstream, an artery
in the right place.

Look, how love feeds
on this well-grounded anger
which flows into people's breath
as a river bent by the wind,
and which is never spoken, but just breaks high vocal cords.

Passers-by scuttle off into doorways,
someone whispers: "Yet here is a great force."
Fear not. Man's daily deeds have a wide span,

a strait riverbed can't imprison them long.
Fear not. For centuries they all stand in Him,
and you look at Him now
through the even knocking of hammers.

2.

Bound are the blocks of stone, the low-voltage wire
cuts deep in their flesh, an invisible whip –
stones know this violence.

When an elusive blast rips their ripe compactness
and tears them from their eternal simplicity,
the stones know this violence.

Yet can the current unbind their full strength?
It is he who carries that strength in his hands:
the worker.

3.

Hands are the heart's landscape. They split sometimes
like ravines into which an undefined force rolls.

The very same hands which man only opens
when his palms have had their fill of toil.

Now he sees: because of him alone others can walk in peace.

Hands are a landscape. When they split, the pain of their sores
surges free as a stream.

But no thought of pain –
no grandeur in pain alone.

For his own grandeur he does not know how to name.

4.

No, not just hands drooping with the hammer's weight,
not the taut torso, muscles shaping their own style,
but thought informing his work,
deep, knotted in wrinkles on his brow,
and over his head, joined in a sharp arc, shoulders and veins vaulted.

So for a moment he is a Gothic building
cut by a vertical thought born in the eyes.
No, not a profile alone,
not a mere figure between God and the stone,
sentenced to grandeur and error.

II. Inspiration

1.

Work starts within, outside it takes such space
that it soon seizes hands, then the limits of breath.
Look – your will strikes a deep bell in stone,
thought strikes certainty, a peak
both for heart and for hand.

For this certainty of mind, this certainty of eye,
for this vertical line
you pay with a a generous hand.
The stone yields you its strength,
and man matures through work
which inspires him to difficult good.

With work then it begins: the growing in the heart and the mind,
great events, a multitude of men are drawn in.
Listen to love that ripens in hammers, in even sounds.
Children will carry them into the future, singing:
“In our fathers’ hearts
Work knew no bounds.”

2.

This inspiration will not end with hands.
Down to stone centers it descends through man’s heart
and from the heart’s center the history of stones
grows large in the layers of earth.
And in man grows the equilibrium

which love learns through anger.

Neither is ever exhausted in man,
ever ceases in the shoulders's tension,
in the heart's hidden gesture.

They partake of each other, fulfilling each other,
raised by a lever which joins movement and thought
in an unbreakable circle.

If from afar you want to enter and stay in man
you must merge these two forces into a language
simple beyond words
(your speech must not break at the lever's tension:
the fulcrum of anger and love).
Then no one will ever tear You
out from the center of man.

III. Participation

The light of this rough plank,
recently carved from a trunk,
is pouring the vastness
of work indivisible into your palms.
The taut hand rests on this Act
which permeates all things in man.

Man, his eyes tired, his eyebrows sharp,
and stones have edges sharp as knives.
Electric current cuts the walls,
an invisible whip. And the sun,
July sun: white fire in the stone.

My hands – do they belong to the light
that now cuts across the railway track,
the pickaxes, the fence overhead?

They belong to the heart and the heart doesn't swear
(keep heart from lips fouled by cursing).

How splendid these men, no airs, no graces,
I know you, look into your hearts,
no pretense stands between us.
Some hands are for toil, some for the cross.
The fence over your heads, pickaxes scattered on the tracks.

Beware of hollows in stone. Electric current
fells columns, pouring them like dust through a sieve.
The young look for a road. All roads
drive straight at my heart. Do stones forgive?

Let the world rest on this balance of hands.
Keep it unchanged in every explosion
of man and stone, over that fence
but a few steps away –
sometimes a child runs carelessly past.

This balance you hold all alone
is both too far and too near.
Now we stoop, now we climb
(the child is careless, might quickly run by).

There is silence again between heart, stone, and tree.
Whoever enters Him keeps his own self.
He who does not
has no full part in the business of this world
despite all appearances.

IV. (In memory of a fellow worker)

1.

He wasn't alone. His muscles grew into the flesh of the crowd,
energy their pulse, as long as they held a hammer,
as long as his feet felt the ground.
And the stone smashed his temples
and cut through his heart's chamber.

2.

They took his body, and walked in a silent line.

3.

Toil still lingered about him, a sense of wrong.
They wore gray blouses, boots ankle deep in mud.
In this they showed the end.

4.

How violently his time halted: the pointers on the low-voltage dials
jerked, then dropped to zero again.
White stone now within him, eating into his being,
taking over enough of him to turn him into stone.

5.

Who will lift up that stone, unfurl his thoughts again
under the cracked temples? So plaster cracks on the wall.
They laid him down, his back on a sheet of gravel.
His wife came, worn out with worry; his son returned from school.

6.

Should his anger now flow into the anger of others?
It was maturing in him through its own truth and love.
Should he be used by those who come after,
deprived of substance, unique and deeply his own?

7.

The stones on the move again: a wagon bruising the flowers.
Again the electric current cuts deep into the walls.
But the man has taken with him the world's inner structure,
where the greater the anger, the higher the explosion of love.