

EASTER

How still they are, these pilgrims,
their faces slack or straining,
in utter disregard
of mirror, camera or any worldly eye.
They wait amid the beauty of white lilies,
and the gray stone of the piazza
wet with a Lenten rain
that fell in the night.

In prayer, self-forgotten,
they remind me of the raw unpainted faces
of women deep in mourning,
lost in plain view.

Or little children,
their unschooled faces pulled awry
by every hurt, want, perplexity;
or the unconfirming faces, sometimes,
of the blind;
or the mistuned speech of the deaf.

A haunting innocence, and I yearn
to be unmasked, unshamed
not looking, always,
darkly through those lenses.

Faces lowered or lifted, to thank or implore,
brows creased as if in pain,
they have fainted into themselves,
and are alone with God
in the public square.

They wait in the chilly darkness
where lanterns all went out
just before dawn.
How still they are, these pilgrims,

how closely gathered, seeming to ask,
can we stay awake this time?
Can we keep the world from ending,
not by flood or fire
but by its own human hand?