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Pádraig Standún

True Cross

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True Cross*

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It was the finest work they had done,
Joseph and he. Man and boy.
A cross fit for decent criminals.
Criminals always needed crosses.

The great cedar had washed ashore,
Planed clean by rolling waters,
White as a corpse, supple and strong.
'A gift from the gods,' Mary said.

About his foster-father's business,
The teenage entrepreneur asked:
'Why don't we make a cross?
Sell it at the market, buy mother a cloak?'

Joseph seemed reluctant.
'Do what he says', Mary said,
As if he knew what they didn't,
The Roman army snapped it up.

That cross was back with a vengeance,
Worn shiny by sweaty backs.
Instrument of torture, shame and glory.
Recycled around the surly villages.

A moment's respite as he lay on the wood,
After days on his feet and knees.
Battered, bowed, beaten,
Broken in body and dreams.

Sound of hammer on nail,
Music to a carpenter's ears.
He knew more about wood
Than those trying to nail him.

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Hit and miss went the boy soldiers,
 Knowing not what they did.
 Add them to the list - forgive them too,
 Everyone but tough love God
 Who made him face his demons.

Hoisted on his own petard,
 High above blue-cloaked Mary,
 And the mockers, like the vultures
 Patiently watching the scarecrow.
 Best view in town that fateful Friday.

* *Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14 September*

Too many words. The set offices of the church can provide an undercurrent to people's spiritual lives and many are nourished by saying them. But at times there are just too many words. Now that I have returned to a more silent practice, I find that reflecting on just a few lines of scripture from the set readings, in front of an icon and candle, carries me through the day. I keep returning to these words and allow them to penetrate my being, whether sitting in front of a microphone, stacking the dishwasher or, reclining at the dentist's. For example, this morning I chose from the weekday missal a verse from Jeremiah about those who trust in the Lord being 'like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream: when the heat comes it feels no alarm, its foliage stays green; it has no worries in a year of drought, and never ceases to bear fruit' (Jeremiah 17:8, *Jerusalem Bible*). What more do I need? These words will stay with me until my head hits the pillow tonight. Even if I am not consciously aware of them during the day, I know that something will be happening inside.

– MICHAEL FORD, *Becoming the Presence of God*, (Dublin: Columba Press) p.41.