

Holy Thursday,  
The Stripping

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*The Celebrant returns to strip the Altar and  
chancel of all ornamentation, recalling the  
stripping of our Lord's body at the crucifixion.*

The stripping proceeds without haste.  
In this choreography  
of total eviction  
a bow accompanies each removal  
of chalices and fair linen,  
candelabra, the historic  
embroidery,  
the gilded Gospel.

The priest  
has handed his scarlet robe  
to the vergers.  
In the emptied chancel  
he pours oil and water  
on the undressed altar,  
washes naked wood  
like a body,  
folds himself in shadow.

Lots are cast.  
Our hearts are wax.  
*Eloi, Eloi, save us*  
from the power of the dog.  
We kneel forsaken  
until there is nothing for us

but to stagger, speechless,  
into the voided  
and vigilant night.