

Palm Sunday in Boston

Late in the morning we cross the Charlestown Bridge
to visit the North End. The day is bright,
the first of spring, but a stinging breeze blows in

off the mud-grey water to the bench where we sit
next to the vacant playground. Past the painted rail
the sea leaps inexhaustible against the pier.

Across the narrow bay the old navy shipyard
lowers its shoulders against the immense ocean,
spreading its docks like fingers out into the water,

which laps against them in wave after wave
escorted by unseen currents. We walk uphill
against the chilling wind and pause

next the old Catholic church. Its services have ended.
Its parishioners hold palm fronds and mingle
in the courtyard. The old men near us converse

in Italian as though they've brought the mother
country with them. As perhaps they have.
We wait in the pastry shop to purchase

two coffees and a cannoli to share. The line is long
but jovial, compassed by good-natured shouting.
I think of some other journey into the city,

so long ago and distant but also lit, maybe,
with sunlight, marked by a louder celebration
and by branches tossed into the animal's path.

They could not have known how soon
he was to leave them, and what in leaving
he would leave them. In the blue-white street

a small girl holds palm fronds and a pastry.
And down the hill, beyond the whitewashed
guardrail, waves crash in from foreign places,

endless plains of water moving with the promise
of more mornings that spell out small replicas
of themselves, ceaselessly—reminders, each, of

creation's strange and disregarded particularity.
Here, now: Sunday morning, cannolis and palm fronds.
No guessing what such a conflation archives—

centuries of triumph, pain, doubt, belief.
Or else the scene means just what it contains:
laughing girl, white sun, snow, green leaf.