

# Ash Wednesday

By John V. Hicks

About the still woods of contemplation  
where winter birds offer asides in subdued voices  
I wander softfoot and quiet minded  
plucking the quince sweetness of penitence.  
Chickadee, grossbeak, waxwing, in these aisles  
anticipate my coming, content, apparently,  
with a time of year and this visitation of  
a solitude whose form I am become; they go  
about their own quick quiet industries  
having to do with waiting a winter out,  
searching for spare morsels as frost  
may have preserved along branches and in  
crotches of twigs and small crevices,  
life left in abeyance that will sustain life  
and so not see the promised resurrection.  
Here with high noon on the snow, soft wings  
and soft voices conduce in goings and comings  
to peace, the rent garment, the unveiling.

Far away a tower speaks Angelus;  
already the day turns to its downward slant of light.  
I remember that I am dust.  
I too shall turn and not return.