

Dies irae, dies illa

Costanzo Porta (c. 1529–1601), from the *Missa mortuorum*. Words attributed to Thomas of Celano, OFM.

The Dies irae is the sequence of the Requiem Mass, and by long tradition its author is Thomas of Celano, the Franciscan friar who wrote the first biographies of St Francis. Costanzo Porta, himself a Franciscan, set the whole sequence for five voices. The choir's part is the first two stanzas, marked below; the complete text is given so that the whole poem can be followed. The metre is a relentless trochaic tread, three rhyming lines to a stanza, softening only at the end where the rhyme scheme breaks and the poem turns into a prayer.

English translation

Latin (as sung)

Stanza 1 (choir)

Day of wrath, that day
will dissolve the world in ashes,
as David and the Sibyl bear witness.

*Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat seclum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.*

Stanza 2 (choir)

How great a trembling there will be
when the Judge is about to come
to examine all things strictly!

*Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando iudex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!*

Stanza 3

The trumpet, scattering its wondrous sound
through the tombs of every land,
will gather all before the throne.

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.*

Stanza 4

Death and nature will stand amazed
when creation rises again
to answer the one who judges.

*Mors stupebit et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura.*

Stanza 5

A written book will be brought forth
in which everything is contained,
by which the world shall be judged.

*Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.*

Stanza 6

So when the Judge takes his seat,
whatever is hidden will appear:
nothing will remain unpunished.

*Judex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit.*

Stanza 7

What then shall I, poor wretch, say?
Which advocate shall I ask for,
when even the just are scarcely safe?

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus,
Cum vix justus sit securus?*

Stanza 8

King of dreadful majesty,
who freely saves those who are to be saved,
save me, fount of mercy.

*Rex tremendae majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis.*

Stanza 9

Remember, merciful Jesus,
that I am the reason for your journey:
do not let me be lost on that day.

*Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae:
Ne me perdas illa die.*

English translation	Latin (as sung)
Stanza 10	
Seeking me, you sat down weary; you redeemed me by suffering the cross: let such labour not be in vain.	<i>Quaerens me, sedisti lassus: Redemisti crucem passus: Tantus labor non sit cassus.</i>
Stanza 11	
Just judge of vengeance, grant the gift of forgiveness before the day of reckoning.	<i>Juste judex ultionis, Donum fac remissionis Ante diem rationis.</i>
Stanza 12	
I groan like one accused; my face blushes with guilt: spare a suppliant, O God.	<i>Ingemisco, tamquam reus: Culpa rubet vultus meus: Supplici parce, Deus.</i>
Stanza 13	
You who absolved Mary Magdalene and heard the thief's prayer have given hope to me as well.	<i>Qui Mariam absolvisti, Et latronem exaudisti, Mihi quoque spem dedisti.</i>
Stanza 14	
My prayers are not worthy, but you, who are good, be kind, so that I do not burn in everlasting fire.	<i>Preces meae non sunt dignae: Sed tu bonus fac benigne, Ne perenni cremer igne.</i>
Stanza 15	
Give me a place among the sheep, and separate me from the goats, setting me on your right hand.	<i>Inter oves locum praesta, Et ab haedis me sequestra, Statuens in parte dextra.</i>
Stanza 16	
When the accursed have been confounded and consigned to the bitter flames, call me with the blessed.	<i>Confutatis maledictis, Flammis acribus addictis, Voca me cum benedictis.</i>
Stanza 17	
I pray, kneeling and bowed down, my heart crushed like ashes: take care of my ending.	<i>Oro supplex et acclinis, Cor contritum quasi cinis: Gere curam mei finis.</i>
Stanza 18	
That day will be full of tears, on which from the ashes rises guilty man to be judged.	<i>Lacrimosa dies illa, Qua resurget ex favilla Judicandus homo reus.</i>
Stanza 19	
Spare him, then, O God: merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest. Amen.	<i>Huic ergo parce, Deus: Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem. Amen.</i>