

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR

Matthew Kelty, ocsa

## **Gethsemani Homilies**

*Revised and Enlarged Edition*

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES

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*Revised and Enlarged Edition*

*by*

Matthew Kelty, ocsso

*Edited, with an Introduction, by*

William O. Paulsell



Cistercian Publications  
[www.cistercianpublications.org](http://www.cistercianpublications.org)

LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota  
[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press

**Cistercian Publications**  
Editorial Offices  
Abbey of Gethsemani  
3642 Monks Road  
Trappist, Kentucky 40051  
www.cistercianpublications.org

Excerpt from ANGEL LETTERS by Sophy Burnham, copyright © 1991 by Sophy Burnham. Used by permission of Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Kelty, Matthew.

Gethsemani homilies / by Matthew Kelty ; edited with an introduction by William O. Paulsell. — Rev. and enl. ed.

p.        cm. — (Monastic wisdom series ; no. 24)

ISBN 978-0-87907-024-3 — ISBN 978-0-87907-927-7 (e-book)

1. Catholic Church—Sermons. 2. Sermons, American. I. Paulsell, William O. II. Title.

BX1756.K418G48 2010  
252'.02—dc22

2010020580

*For*  
*Timothy Kelly, ocsO*  
*Abbot of Gethsemani 1973–2000*  
*with Thanks*



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## INTRODUCTION

A retreatant stood patiently by the door of the chaplain's office, waiting for a chance to spend a little time with Father Matthew Kelty. The man or woman, as the case may be, knew that he or she would receive good counsel, given with a sense of humor and a lively spirit by Matthew. The guest house at the Abbey of Gethsemani is always full of people: clergy and laity, Catholic and Protestant, people of many religions or no religion at all. The tradition of silence, the beauty of the surroundings, and the haunting chant of the monks in the Divine Offices throughout the day have a calming effect on people, enabling them to explore their inner depths and search for God on a deeper level than is possible in their normal daily routines.

Father Matthew provided counsel in the afternoons and a half hour talk to retreatants in the evening after the last monastic service of the day. He always began these talks by reading a few favorite poems by John Milton, Matthew Arnold, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Frost, Thomas Merton, and many others. Then he would say something about the day, the saint or feast of the day, a particular holiday, or something of astronomical significance such as the summer solstice. He often talked about the life of the monk and told some stories to illustrate his point that the love and presence of God are always with us. His constant theme was, *Where did we come from, why are we here, where are we going, and why me?* The retreatants hung on every word. Matthew had a way with words.

He was born in 1915 in Boston, went to public schools, entered the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), a missionary order, and was ordained as a priest in 1946. He served as a missionary in New Guinea and, later, as editor of the order's magazine, *The*

*Christian Family*. In 1960 he entered Gethsemani and became a Trappist monk.

I first knew him in 1970 when he was sent to lead a small experimental monastery that Gethsemani had taken over near Oxford, North Carolina. I was teaching at a nearby liberal arts college at the time and often made retreats at Matthew's community. There were never more than three or four monks there. The idea was that they would lead a simple life of prayer, support themselves by weaving scarves, ponchos, and other items, and not have to maintain a large abbey.

Matthew had gradually sensed a call to solitude that his superiors at Gethsemani had resisted. He is a gregarious, outgoing, energetic person, not the usual personality for a hermit. But Matthew felt a need to develop the other side of his personality, the solitary, introverted side that few people ever actually saw.

So, after three years in the small Oxford monastery, he returned to Papua New Guinea, the site of his earlier missionary labors, and lived in a small hermitage for almost ten years. In 1982, at age sixty-seven, he returned to Gethsemani, much enriched by the hermit experience, and resumed the community life of a Trappist-Cistercian monk.

The homilies in this collection were delivered at Gethsemani, usually at Sunday masses, but sometimes to retreatants or in chapter sessions in the monastery. Most are brief. They reveal much about the monastic life, but even more about the Christian gospel itself.

Because of a serious illness in 2005, Matthew had to give up serving as chaplain, much to the disappointment of retreatants, some of whom had heard him year after year. If, on occasion, Matthew used a talk they had heard before in other retreats, they really didn't mind. They loved whatever he did.

In 2006 Matthew reached age ninety-one. Feeling that he had fulfilled his preaching ministry, he asked the abbot to be relieved of that duty. A final collection was published in 2008, *Singing for the Kingdom: The Last of the Homilies*, by Cistercian Publications.

Matthew is still very active at the monastery. He gets about with the help of an electric cart. He rolls into the church for all

the Divine Offices, makes his way to his choir stall, and sings the psalms while seated. From time to time he takes his turn at the reception desk in the guest house, chatting with retreatants and those who call on the phone.

This collection of homilies was first published in 2001. There were some production problems that showed up in the book, so it was decided to issue this new, corrected version. It contains a piece about Thomas Merton not included in the first edition.

During one of our annual retreats at Gethsemani my wife Sally and I interviewed Matthew for several hours.

WOP: Tell us about your growing up in Massachusetts and what led you into the priesthood.

MK: Ours was what you might call a traditional Catholic family. They really didn't know much about the faith. Very simple people, but a profound love for the faith. They loved the Church. We didn't make all that kind of money, but we lived in a nice suburb. The church used to print a booklet on how much you gave. They went down Adams Street where we lived and listed what everyone gave. My father didn't give all that much, but it was more than most, and he was proud of it.

I always wanted to be a priest, but we never talked about it. I went to a public school so my exposure to the faith was minimal. It wasn't what you would call a thriving parish. It was a beautiful church and all that. I don't ever remember a sermon, but I'm sure there were sermons. There was traditional piety: Stations of the Cross during Lent, Sacred Heart devotions during June. That sort of thing. Never a sung Mass; a very modest choir. Today it is quite different. Now there is a big staff; then only two priests, a housekeeper, and a janitor.

WOP: You saw what the priests did and decided that is what you wanted to do?

MK: No, I didn't want to be a parish priest. At first I wanted to do something with monks, or a religious order. I applied to the Franciscans after high school, but I hadn't had any Latin or Greek, and

no money either. The Depression had hit bottom, so they said they were full. The pastor said I should apply at the minor seminary for the Divine Word Society (SVD) down the coast. I didn't know if there were still monks. I knew about them from medieval history, but I thought they were gone. I knew about Jesuits and Franciscans, that's about all. And sisters. There was a monastery in Rhode Island (now Spencer, Massachusetts), but I had never even heard of it. So I signed up at the minor seminary, although I had to go back and do some high school over again. They wouldn't let me pick up the Latin and Greek I needed and skip the rest. No, they said I should belong to a group. I think they were testing me to see how serious I was. So I stuck it out anyway. Once I got into college and the theologate it was easier.

I wasn't there a year, when they hired a layman, Polish, a shoemaker. His boy was studying in our class, but he didn't persevere. The man was a widower. A year or two later, he went off to the monks in Rhode Island, and stayed too. That's what I wanted to do, but I never pursued it. When I went to college I heard more about it and looked it up and told them I wanted to be a monk. They said, "Oh, you are not monk material." They meant well. They didn't think I had the makeup. So I said, "OK."

Then I went to Techny, the SVD headquarters in Chicago, and was in the novitiate and took vows. I thought, "Well, you can't have two women," so I settled for one, the SVD, and that was it. Off and on through the seminary I would think wistfully about being a monk, but I never did anything about it because they said, "Stay where you are." Then, to rub it in, one of the SVDs from the Philippines, an American, came back and entered here at Gethsemani, with the idea that he would be part of a new foundation from here in the Philippines, which the abbot agreed to because they had lots of monks. He was open to making a foundation. The Filipinos were annoyed because they were in the most Catholic of all the Asian countries, and they were bypassed for monasteries in Japan and other places. The war came, and he gave up because he thought it would never end. Then he came home from Gethsemani, and I think he later went back to the Philippines. When he came home my heart was moved. He was shaven and he was skinny, like a Marine. But he lived to see the monks come to the

Philippines. So, it was a kind of secret love affair I had about monks which I used to dream about but never acted on. I never really studied Thomas Merton. I think I read the *Seven Storey Mountain*, I don't really remember, so I wasn't doing anything about this and never visited any monasteries. When I came home from the mission field to Techny, I came through Europe. They took me to one in Germany, but I wasn't impressed because it was a big late Renaissance mansion that was made into a monastery. It wasn't a typical monastery; it looked like a mistake.

I then taught every day and worked on the SVD magazine, a house organ to support the missions, from 1951–1960. It was losing money, but they didn't want to drop it. Then the General, fed up with their procrastination, just decreed by telegram that the magazine is finished, as of now. So we just stopped there and the last issue went through in November. Then I came down here to Gethsemani, for I thought, "Here's your chance." I was out of a job. It was like a professor being fired in the middle of the term. So I came down and made a retreat.

WOP: This was in 1960?

MK: November, 1959. I had one look and thought, I'll go with this! It had the smell of wet wool mixed with incense. There was no heat, you know, in the house, and they wore wool. The place was damp and the wool smelled like a wet dog. Then there was the daily touch of incense, so there were two attractive smells. Getting up at three o'clock, putting on nice clothes, and singing psalms; that's for me.

There wasn't any screening thing like they have now. They didn't even have a vocation man. I don't know why. Anyway, Merton came over and talked to me for about ten minutes and said, "Well, I guess if you want to come you can come." I thought, "That's enough for me!" They never let on they were interested. You know, it's the diffident style. It's like a woman pretending she's not interested. Of course I was already a priest and had been in religious life for twenty years. It's not like I was just a boy.

WOP: What year were you ordained?

MK: Fifty-two years ago, 1946, and I came here when I was forty-five. One of the monks was a psychiatrist, and you know how psychiatrists are, they look at your fingernails and your eyes and then they are reading all kinds of signs. He went through the same routine for five minutes and then said, "Well, I guess if you want to come you can come." And I thought, "Well, I'm coming."

So I was ready to come, but first I had a retreat to give way up in the northern part of Wisconsin to some sisters. I traveled overnight on the train. We were roaring through Illinois about six o'clock in the morning, doing about sixty-five or seventy. There was snow on the ground, and we hit a flatbed truck with three guys in the front seat.

WOP: You wrote about that in *Flute Solo*, didn't you?

MK: Yes. In those days you couldn't eat or drink before Communion, and the first mitigation was you could drink water. Then the second mitigation was you could drink liquids. When you are traveling on a train you go to the dining car early in the morning and, of course, there's nobody there and for a dollar they bring you coffee in a big silver urn and cream and sugar and a rose. It was pure luxury. And the waiter stands there and talks to you. And while we're talking the train shook just like that. So we look out the window three seconds later and see this truck like a toy flying through the air. It was just daylight. The train backed up. There was blood all over the snow; it smelled like a butcher shop. I baptized the boy with snow.

The retreat was my last assignment. Then, I was home only a few days and I was going to come, and we had a fire on the thirteenth of January. I was sleeping in the printing plant and got out just in time. Then I ran through the building. I was naked, just in my underwear, and I stepped on melted hot asphalt from the roof and burned a hole in my foot. Then I had to run across the yard to tell the rest of them about the fire. So all that held me up for a while, but I finally got here in February.

WOP: 1960?

MK: Yes. And then when I got here I knew this was the right place for me. It was very difficult because I was forty-five, and by that time you have had a few shabby episodes in your life, and this place could be dreadful. The silence then was total. Now it's palatable; then it was grim. You couldn't talk to anybody, and I didn't know the sign language. The hours in church were longer. The work was harder and the food was poor and the place was cold. So it was difficult. In that silence everything in your past from day one goes through your memory. It's very hard because there are no other distractions. Over and over again you think about your past. I used to get so weary. It's like a laundry where you wash your clothes and put them in the dryer and you think that's finally over. It's not over. You do it again. But finally it stops. That's what drives people away from here, the quiet, especially if you are older. Choir is long and it doesn't take all of your attention to sing the psalms. So you are always thinking about the past.

WOP: What did you think of your novice master, Thomas Merton?

MK: Well, he was not my type; he was an intellectual. We could never be friends; in fact, I probably wouldn't be friends with any of these monks, and yet there is real love and I am very fond of them. It's beautiful, but it's not that kind of a relationship. It's the difference from having good friends and having your brothers. Both of them are beautiful but they are different. These are not my friends, but they are my brothers, and that may sound funny. Merton would never be my friend because he was all brains and he lived in another world than the one I live in. He was English and I am a Celt, and English are Teutonic. But he was good.

The lasting memory I have of him concerned an incident during Lent. During Lent there is fasting and you get hungry and a little tired and irritable and impatient. On a dreadful day when it's about twenty-five degrees outside, and a wind blowing in from Canada, he sends you out with a bush hook which is so dull you can't cut anything with it, to cut bushes from the hillside.

Really make-do work, cleaning up the hillside. And then the next day with the bright sunshine and crocus beginning to show and spring is coming, and its fifty degrees outside, just beginning to get warm, and he sends me upstairs to type. I can't type. I hunt and peck and he wants me to type his manuscripts on A. B. Dick stencils. He was never satisfied with what he wrote. He would redo it; he would make a few corrections on this page, but major corrections on the back of the previous page. So you are typing along on this page and then you realize, you forgot the insert. He never shortened; he always expanded and added whole paragraphs in writing I couldn't read.

It would be all right if you could guess, but if it was proper names you couldn't guess. Appomattox; how do you spell it? You had to know the word. You weren't supposed to bother him after he started working. That was one of his rules. He would be highly concentrated on what he was doing. I would have to go down to his room and knock. I would say, "I can't read your writing," and he would look at me like "Your mother dropped you when you were a baby." He was terrible to work for. I used to dread that.

One day he lines us all up and he goes down the line and he says, "Father Matthew, you will type." I said, "No." And he said, "Father Matthew, you will type." And I said, "No." Then the third time he said, "You will type." "OK," I said, "I will type." No one else would have tolerated that, if you had said "No." It was an order. Three times. I think that was it if I had done it again. The end! I never forgot that. Other monks here still remember that exchange.

But Merton could understand a forty-five-year-old man who was new and hungry and tired and irritable or whatever and was asked to do something that he found very difficult. He was tolerant enough to appreciate that and to give me a break. Most people wouldn't be bothered. I wouldn't.

WOP: Was the fasting more rigorous in those days?

MK: Yes, less to eat. Fasting in my book is a disaster; it just doesn't work for me. You just had coffee and bread in the morning and

you dipped the coffee out of a big cauldron. It would be steaming because the refectory had no heat. I was hungry all day. A huge meal at noon of soup and vegetables, but at two o'clock I would be famished. Supper would be a piece of cheese and another piece of bread and some fruit. It was all right; you got enough to eat.

WOP: It was breakfast and the evening meal when you fasted?

MK: Yes, one main meal a day was the idea. Only the softies took anything in the morning. That was for the chicken-hearted, those that had no guts. It is the same only now you can get more in the morning and more in the evening. It's not as grim as it was.

I think a lot of the energy went into staying warm because most of the house wasn't heated, except the scriptorium. The refectory was cold, and the dormitory was cold; the church had some heat, but it was tough. Anyway, Merton had a sense of compassion and understanding, rather than just treating us officially, if you know what I mean. First of all, he was not a boy; he was an older man.

The novices were an interesting bunch. One was right out of high school, there were two or three priests, one from a religious order and one from a diocese, one was a religious brother. There was one from Ford Motor Company, hired by McNamara so he must have been important. There were a couple of high school graduates, a very mixed group.

WOP: Let's go back to Oxford for a minute and talk about solitude. Why did you want to go into solitude?

MK: I was sent to New Guinea as a young priest in 1947. In the seminary we had to live in community life. Everything was together. We followed the rule of St. Ignatius: "Never alone." When you went on a walk you always had to have someone with you. You were never allowed to touch anyone. You lived this high intensity community life. Then they take you to New Guinea and they put you out in the jungle one hundred miles from nowhere with a Dutchman you saw three or four days a month. We were

circuit riders. We had the main station. When I'm home, he's out. Three days here, three days there, making the rounds. Then he'd come home and I'd go out. We would be together just a few days. I almost went crazy with loneliness. You can't talk to primitives. I was there almost three years. I used to have a depression that was almost physical in the afternoons. We didn't have any books or radio. This was right after World War II.

Anyway, you didn't write home then and tell them, "I don't like it here, bring me home." That just wasn't done. So I went to church one night and said to the Lord, "If I'm not going to make it, get me out of here." I was scared of cracking up or something. About two weeks later we had the annual retreat. It was the one time of the year when everybody got together. The logistics were phenomenal because they had to get these people from all over: horseback, ships, it was quite a maneuver. And we were supposed to keep silence when we got there. Well, we didn't because it was the only time of the year we met. Some priest gave five or six talks a day.

While I'm there the bishop called me aside and he said, "I've got news for you. They want you back in Techny."

I said, "Whose doing is that; yours or theirs?" I figured he might be getting rid of me. He said, "It's theirs." They wanted me to come home and edit this magazine. A friend said, "Tell them you don't want to do it." I said, "I'm glad to do what I'm told." I wasn't that anxious to stay.

So I came home through Europe. That was 1951. The general, the head of the outfit (SVD) asked me, "How do you like your new appointment?" I said, "I think it's a mistake."

I enjoyed community life. After you were ordained the community life was less vigorous. You didn't see that much of one another. The evening recreation after dinner was minimal. Most of the fathers went to the recreation room and read the paper. They had been teaching all day and they weren't interested in sitting down and making idle chatter. But I was, because I was by myself all day. I was in an office with a magazine.

So I came here to Gethsemani because I loved the prayer life and the liturgy life and I wanted a life of prayer and a life of community. Then Merton started talking about solitude. I told

him, "I'm not interested. I had that. I know all about it. I've been into it; it's not for me." But it kept coming up; it was a favorite theme of his. The solitude of the monastic life was in the silence. We are together in solitude. But he, through his studies, maintained that it's not just the silence; it is supposed to be actual, physical solitude for those who want it and are capable of it. And he proved his point. Eventually, the abbot who had opposed him brought it up at the general chapter and had it passed as legislation, that it was legitimate to have hermits.

Well, after a while I began to give it some thought and understood what he was talking about and then began to take some time out and spend some time alone. I got myself a little hut and spent some time out in the woods and then it was fixed so that I could have a day a week.

WOP: That was the pump house below the dam?

MK: Yes. Then finally I began to understand solitude, what it means. I wanted to do it full time. But I didn't want to do it out back of the monastery. You know, if you get married you don't live upstairs. You want to get a house of your own. By that time we had a new abbot and I talked to him for a few months about it. I used to have to talk to him about work, and when we were done with work I would talk about solitude. Finally, I caught on that he wasn't buying it. I finally said, "Will you let me do this?" "No." He said, "If you want to do it, go do it." "With your blessing?" I asked. "No." If I had said, "I am going," he would have said, "How much do you want?" and he would have written me a check. That's the way many abbots operate. Then it's not on their conscience. Their way of thinking, which is not my way of thinking, is that if your conscience tells you to do something, you are supposed to do it, whether you get a blessing or not. For an Irishman, that's no way to operate. What's the point of the vow of obedience if you don't govern your life by it? My theory is that, and I'm sure it's correct, if God gives me the idea, he can surely work through the abbot to confirm it. If he doesn't, there is surely something wrong, and the wrong is probably me. You follow me? That's the way the thing is set up.

Sometimes people want to do something and they go ahead and do it. The abbot doesn't oppose it, but he doesn't bless it, and that way the abbot keeps his hands clean.

Well, anyway, I gave up. Then about three months later he was given the little monastery at Oxford, North Carolina. He didn't have anyone else around who was interested in solitude, at least in whom he had any faith. So, that's where he sent me. It turned out to be providential because it was a superb preparation for what was to come, although I didn't know that at the time. For six months I was there alone. Otherwise, there were only two or three other monks. We always had guests coming. I loved it. I thought it was wonderful. I liked the way we lived it, the style of prayer and Mass.

Then a new abbot was elected. He had no interest in the place, so he gave it away to Spencer. When he came over to make a retreat before becoming abbot he hadn't been there twenty minutes when he said, "Are you still interested in going into solitude somewhere?" We talked about it and I suggested Vancouver where there was a bishop who had a colony of hermits. Then I suggested Ireland where they would never let a hermit starve to death, you know, and New Guinea where I was known. The abbot's council picked Papua New Guinea, so that's where I went. So it all turned out. Then I had more solitude than I could manage, more than enough. It was good. I stayed there for nine years. It was a nice experience.

When I got to New Guinea, I looked for a place to go and the bishop suggested Bogia, the site of the mission, about one hundred miles up the coast on top of a hill. It is where the mission used to be, and it was all bombed out during the war. After the war the people asked them to move down to the beach, on the shore, which they did. It was beautiful. There was a volcano about ten miles out to sea right in front of me. I could see one hundred miles down the coast. It was just gorgeous.

The bishop said, "Draw a plan and I'll send someone up to build a place for you." It was six months before he came, a youngster from Bristol, England. Meanwhile, I had a little house by the shore at the mission. I lived there alone and ate with the fathers and said Mass and the Office by myself and had plenty of time.

And that's when I started writing *Flute Solo*, just to get some thoughts on paper. I wrote it during Holy Week, finished Easter Monday. I thought, maybe this will help someone. So I sent it in longhand to a sister I met in North Carolina who lived in Raleigh, and told her that she could probably find someone to type it up. I sent her my Mass money. She sent it to Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, and they turned it down, so it ended up at Gethsemani for the file and I said, "When I die you can read it in the refectory." Two years later, the publisher asked for it back. They wanted to look at it again. The second time they took it. Meanwhile the Gethsemani artist who did these icons left. He was gay and he later caught AIDS. Anyway, when he left he was floundering around and getting nowhere, so the publisher went and got him and put him in the art department. He did the cover for my book.

While writing the book I came to terms with myself and was perfectly happy. That made living alone fruitful again because I wasn't unhappy and running away from something. I was able to work out on paper who I was. A solitary experience for that kind of person can be very fruitful because the inner dialogue of the two dimensions of the person, male and female if you want to call them that, is very strong and the personal enterprise then becomes very healthy and good. You see, most people work out the relationship, the dynamics of their male and female sides through external marriage and through marriage learn to come to terms with their other side. Sally teaches you how to come to terms with your total person and she from you and then later you grow into persons who are totally integrated and now the love is different, now you love each other's person, not needing one another but enjoying one another. Because it is through one another that each have attained to full development as persons. It's not just a psychological thing because a person is the one who is capable of your love. Up until that stage the person is just on the way. Christ, therefore, is the model not just for men but for women, too, because he is not a male, he is a person and we love him as a complete integrated person. Our culture stresses toughness, masculine, you know, the men are supposed to be tough and women are supposed to be child brides. Well, it was the

women who revolted first and said, "We are not child brides, we are people." Men are finally beginning to catch on.

In the monastic context it works out very healthily that way because we do a lot of feminine things, so-called: wash dishes, serve one another, take care of the sick, set the table, wash the clothes, clean the house, all things usually associated with women. At the same time, we earn our living, make an income, pay the taxes, you know, do all the male things. So there is both, not just one or the other. Now sisters, nuns, are moving over into administration, running huge hospitals, universities, orphanages. It takes not merely maternal capacities but masculine authoritarian capabilities, and then doing it alone intensifies it. That's why celibacy can be healthy, why it isn't sick. I never wanted to be married; it never occurred to me because I had more woman in me than I could handle. I don't need another one. For a kid this is terrible when you are growing up and everyone is into seeking girls. You know the high school talk; it didn't mean a thing to me. I mean people are interesting, but as far as sexual objects, that meant nothing to me. So you begin to realize that something is wrong, somewhere. Then when I got into seminary they used to talk about girls and I used to think, well, their vocations are pretty wishy-washy, not very strong. I never had any of that interest. It didn't occur to me, of course, what it meant.

SP: Do you remember when you visited Atlantic Christian College and one of your lectures was on the anima and the animus? I wondered if that was when you were beginning to work out your own identity.

MK: Yes, I was reading Jung then. I started reading him here. Jung was still very unpopular in those days because he was the first psychiatrist to say that religion had anything to do with psychiatry. Most of them said it was a no-no. People called him a mystic. They didn't mean it in a flattering sense; they meant he was a fake. To counteract that the Bollingen Foundation, I don't know who it is, translated all his works and had them published and sent them to psychiatrists. They came out in great big volumes, bound in black, looked very mysterious. There were about twenty

volumes, a big set, in a section of the library just for priests. It was considered a bit dangerous. That's the way it was in those days. I was in the library one day and I see this big set of books. I had never heard of the man. I saw these books and I was fascinated and I started to read him at random. It did me as much good as Merton. He took traditional monastic terms and structures and translated them into psychological language.

We speak psychological language; we don't speak the language the fathers of the church spoke. The church fathers used a different kind of language. It can just go by you and it doesn't jell, it doesn't click. Whereas Jung talks in psychological language; that's where we are, that's where we live. And he would use terms like *anima* and *animus*, terms that you could grasp. That started here, and I was already into it when I went to Oxford. I had talked to Juniors here about what I knew about it, and then at Oxford it worked out.

The experience in New Guinea as a hermit was different from the first time because I wasn't an official ecclesiastic, so the people related to me differently. They like priests and brothers and sisters, they like the Church, they don't have any argument, but you're still an official, where this time I was just a guy on the hill. I had no official capacity, so they could be very free with their language. I discovered things I didn't know about them, and that is that the men are extremely affectionate and warm and friendly among themselves. However, in the presence of Europeans they put their hands down and act, by our standards, very normal because they know that American and European men don't touch. So when they were in our presence they never did. When I was by myself and got to know them, I discovered that they loved to touch and embrace, and kiss among themselves. So I took to being affectionate with them. Oh, dear God, it wasn't sexy, it was just affection. To kiss them would be overwhelming because no European male ever kissed them and they would be so happy and would think, "He is just like us." It was very touching because we as a culture are very European. We can't be any other way. We are colder and they are not. They don't understand it. They are real sharp. Like any people who have been subdued, they learn what is acceptable and what is not to the governing

power. So they are careful not to do anything that doesn't look right. That was a real eye-opener. Then I realized that they are probably healthier than we are in the sense that they are more uninhibited in their affection for each other. I don't know how you get people like the Poles and people like John Paul II. I saw two films in New Guinea in German, one on John Paul and one on Mother Teresa. Every person that John Paul would talk to he would touch. Touch, touch, touch. And Mother Teresa was the same. Wherever she went she always touched the people. The monks aren't very affectionate. When I came back from New Guinea, having been away for nine and a half years I was kissing the monks because I was very glad to see them. They would go along with it, but they were a little bit uncomfortable. After about a month of that I realized that cultural patterns are different here. They were very nice about it, but most preferred a handshake.

WOP: Are there other things you learned in solitude?

MK: There is darkness and evil and ugliness, and the capacity and tendency for that is present in the human. That is something you confront in quiet. Not only personal sinfulness, but an awareness of a deeper sinful dimension or capacity for it in the human. In other words, the unconscious has to be redeemed, has to be saved by Christ. Unless that is done the conversion isn't really complete. There is kind of a cosmic dimension to evil so that the monks' participation in the search for good and for God isn't easy. You discover that you are kith and kin not only to holy people but also to sinful people who get caught up in ugliness and violence and the sins of the world. That, too, has to be redeemed somehow.

WOP: I have heard other people say that in solitude they feel closer to the human family.

MK: Yes, that's another way of putting it. You realize in your own personal history that you are not all that different given a change of circumstances. So compassion rises in your heart and you become really loath to point a finger at anyone. You realize what

you would do under similar circumstances. So it makes you more merciful.

People avoid quiet because the first confrontation is personalized in their own lives and they back off. It's kind of foolish because if you're not that absorbed in the mercy of God you don't get anywhere. But if you move further on, the idea of participation in the whole drama of salvation becomes very real. And that would be the heart of this place. It's not just a personal salvation trip; it becomes an engagement with the whole picture, the whole program. I call the monastic life an art form. It is a way of expressing a Christian truth that is slightly exaggerated just as most art is a little bit overdone, not too much, just a little exaggerated and people get it. They understand that it's an art form. Not everybody has to be a monk, but they know what a monk is saying and they are able to agree with it.

WOP: I disagree with you in your comparison of yourself with Merton. You are an intellectual.

MK: But I had no intellectual training, let's put it that way.

WOP: You read, you write, you think deeply. You are an intellectual.

MK: Well, I never thought of it that way. Some people find someone like me who thinks haphazardly and intuitively, juvenile. We have someone here that I call a real intellectual. He has been educated and trained and disciplined and he has a lot of knowledge.

WOP: You are a self-educated intellectual.

MK: Yeah, you pick up things along the way here. Well, I enjoy being what I am. I don't feel bad about it. When I see some intellectuals I think, God help us. I have God in my life and I have everything I want. I know I had nothing to do with it.

WOP: Tell us about the major changes here that have taken place at Gethsemani since you came here.

MK: It's nicer. It's more gentle, more kind, more tolerant. I think the old regime was good and it worked and they liked it but I think its time had come. It was very rigorous and it produced a bunch of tough men. Because it was tough they were under pressure and it was hard. You don't have much tolerance under pressure. Short tempers. You know food, everything, the whole total program, was difficult. It produced holy people, no question. Any kind of suffering will. Over the years it has become more kind. The abolition of the Chapter of Faults changed the whole contour.<sup>1</sup> It's one thing to accuse yourself; quite another to accuse others. You are aware that people are watching you, and then you are watching others to catch some fault. You had to have something to say, you can't just show up week after week and not say anything. You were made to feel guilty if you did not take part in the exercises, so you had to find things to say. You can see what that does to a community.

WOP: When did that go out?

MK: In the 60s. The major changes came with Vatican II. We didn't think in negative terms about our life. It was just the way things had been; that's just the way they were. There was love all right. You have to be pretty good to pull back and say this is not right.

I used to talk to the brothers with sign language. There really wasn't much communication. You certainly couldn't just sit down and talk to anyone. The brothers got very proficient at signs. It's

1. The Chapter of Faults was an ancient monastic custom, a meeting of the community in which several monks accused themselves of external faults, such as being late, breaking silence, or damaging community property, which they might have committed. They received a penance from the abbot. After the self-accusations were over, any monk who had noticed an unacknowledged fault in another brother could accuse him before the community. Serious faults were, of course, reserved for the privacy of the confessional.

not a language like sign language is, you could never teach with it. It's pragmatic, practical, but it was very useful and I compared it to a hum of bees. There was a hum in the community with signs. It was esoteric, exotic, it was strange. No one else could do it, only monks had this secret language. The brothers were good at it because they were with each other all day, and they were communicating day and night, and that relieved a lot of pressure. It also created problems. There was a lot of misunderstanding from misreading signals. But I thought it was a real benefit because it released pressure. When the monks started talking they couldn't control it and there was talking everywhere. So we had a fake kind of silence.

Most seminaries and religious orders in those days, and to some extent now, had hours and times of silence. After night prayer there was silence, and it was rigorous. You weren't supposed to communicate. A smile was considered out of order. You were to stay out of each other's hair. There was a funny side to sign language. You could look out your window and follow a conversation down in the courtyard. Then when they dropped the rigid practice of silence, the monks had to learn how to be quiet. It didn't take long. They realized that the house couldn't have talking everywhere and they settled down. So we have a quiet place. There is no talking in your room or the corridors or the library or the scriptorium or the refectory, church, sacristy. But they talk at work, small talk, chatter, some of them. It's not bad. And there are little clusters: the kitchen crew, the fruitcake crowd, bakers. There are little groups. I am isolated over here in the guest house. So I don't get the news or what's going on. I have to go look for it. I go by the kitchen sometimes just to see what's new. Otherwise you can get very isolated. Then you can always take a walk with somebody, too, so it's much better. Still, it's not slack. The tone of the place is good. You never hear ugly words or snapping at each other.

That used to happen, well, you know, when men get under pressure. We just had a lot of crazy customs. The choir used to be much bigger, maybe it was harder to handle, I don't know, and of course everything was in Latin. The choirmaster would walk up and down the choir with little signs that said, "Slow down the

ending, not so fast, soften the ending," stuff like that. Sometimes the monks would be touchy and irritable in choir because people were dragging or they were too fast or whatever. The hours in church are not as long now, not as tedious. Sometimes the tone was set too high, like Solesmes, and we sounded like a bunch of eunuchs. Everything was high. When you were done with Matins your throat would be sore because it was supposed to sound ethereal and angelic. Awful. They don't do that anymore.

In the past they worked much harder and longer, morning and afternoon and harder physical work. For ten years we tore the building down; it was hard physical labor. The choir monks worked on the building. The brothers had their own work to do. Tearing it up and replacing it with steel. So, it's toned down a lot. And then we had all these meetings, dialogues and committees. And all kinds of stuff in the wash of Vatican II.

Finally, the showdown came. One of the monks acted as the overseer. He put the place on its feet financially. He was a genius. He had a handsome herd of Holstein, the dairy, he updated the whole operation, it was all made scientific, and then the whole business of fruitcake and cheese and advertising, he was into engineering and farming and agriculture. There were a lot of competent people here. Then we got into alfalfa and that whole business. Then pigs, we raised pork and we sold country ham and bacon, all mail order. The monks worked very hard. Merton was a big one for saying, "Cool it." General Motors for Jesus is not the idea. Too much. They finally confronted the overseer and said, "How much would we have to work to make it?" He said, "If you work four hours a day we can make it." So that's what toned everything down. Then, we got a new abbot. You remember the gift shop? The monks hated it. Busloads of ladies came out from Louisville. At that time we were on the Gray Line tour along with my Old Kentucky Home, Jim Beam, the Cathedral, Abraham Lincoln's birthplace. They would wind up here at two o'clock, attend the service of None, and then go down to the gift shop, buy stuff and go home. Almost daily. There were tours in the monastery. All the retreatants would go through the place on Wednesdays and Saturdays. It was like a zoo, you know. There were big groups in those days.

Anyway, once it was decided that we didn't need to work that hard, that there was no point in it, the afternoons were free. We worked in the morning. Some chores were in the afternoon: kitchen, setting tables, that kind of stuff. And then there was some work in the afternoon. If you wanted to work you could. But the tone of the place quieted down, it was less hectic. A former abbot used to say, "You want to be like the poor, do what the poor do, they work hard." The shift came, when the next abbot just turned everything off. He wasn't interested. He turned all the money over to the monks. I think he learned later that you had to be more cautious. But many of the monks were capable. They gave money away because they thought we had too much. You remember in the 60s there was much concern about the third world, and the poor, and minorities. Stashing money away was considered unethical, so they gave a lot away. They didn't waste it. But when the next abbot wanted to rebuild the guest house they didn't have any money. So they went to our retired abbot and said, "Would you go to some of your friends for money to remodel the guest house?" He knew he had left a lot of money when he retired, but most of it had been given away. Anyway, we got by.

There is a beautiful room upstairs in the library that has an open vaulted ceiling. It's the scriptorium, a room with a wonderful view. At the end of the wing is a little chapel, like a miniature choir with choir stalls. Before, when we were still in Latin, the abbot had the Office translated into English, maybe except Matins, exactly as we had it. It was Latin and English together. They were doing it when I came. In fact, I had to read proof for the text. The brothers, maybe seventy-five, all went to this choir and did the Offices in English in anticipation. The abbot knew that down the road English was coming for everybody. That went on for about ten years. He had hoped that all the brothers would move from that over to the regular (priest) choir when the change to English came. But they didn't. They said, "We're not into this Office business." Some of them did, maybe half of them. In the old days everybody in the choir was a priest. The abbot hoped the brothers would move en masse. Some houses had a lot of trouble because the brothers didn't want to become choir monks. They wanted to keep their lifestyle because they liked it.

WOP: I remember coming to an Office here almost forty years ago when everybody was present.

MK: Brothers came to Sunday Vespers and Sunday Lauds and Compline every night. They sang along with us. They sang by memory without knowing what they were singing.

WOP: Do you still have brothers that don't come to choir?

MK: Oh yes. That's the first question that people ask, "How many are you?" Oh, about seventy, seventy-five. "Well, where are they?" Some are sick and some of them say Our Father, Hail Mary Offices, or say the psalms by themselves. They work it out with the abbot. Technically, if they entered as brothers you can't change the system on them in midlife. So most of the younger brothers enter and simply go to choir. Even if they can't sing they go along with it. For most of the young ones entering today, that's what a monk is. You go to choir, you go to work and you read your books.

SP: We saw pictures of how you used to sleep in cells.

MK: Yes, that has changed, we have private rooms now. That was another big help because you had no place to go. You couldn't go to the dormitory during the day. It was only for sleep. Merton always had a cubicle in a corner someplace because he couldn't stand snoring and some of them snored. If you are tired enough you just go to sleep, but he couldn't. He was too restless. And they never opened a window all winter. It smelled like wet wool because it was cold. There was no heat. And when it gets cold it gets damp. And you had huge blankets, and you wore your clothes to bed, wool. Everything was together. You read books together, you had your desk, you had a scriptorium, the brothers had a scriptorium. Now it's a reading room.

WOP: What kind of reaction was there when they dropped Latin here?

MK: Oh, they couldn't wait! They were glad. When I came here I had grown up in a Latin background. I thought it was beautiful. I liked the big Latin books. I hadn't been here but a month or two when I heard them talking about when are we going to get rid of it. Get rid of it? I thought they were out of their minds. Why would you get rid of it? Oh, they couldn't wait, and there were all kinds of rumors. First it was going to be the Mass, and then it was going to be active orders and so on, and even the Benedictines would change, but our monks would keep their Latin. Finally, all that was left was the contemplatives that don't have an active ministry, and Paul VI pled with the Cistercians to keep the Latin. Somebody should keep it and sing it. "No," they said, "No way. We're not a museum. What do you think we are, a relic?" There are a few places in Europe, and the Common Observance Cistercians, some of those houses, still do it.

WOP: I was at a Common Observance house in Dallas and they did it.

MK: Yes, they didn't change it. And some houses in Europe where there is more of a Latin background. It wasn't all that high quality music; some of it was pretty mediocre, but every now and then there were some beautiful things. They used that Latin Psalter for one thousand years. Jerome translated it. That was traditional with the monks. The Vulgate. Some of the melodies were very old and go way back into the time of Ambrose and those people.

WOP: How about the choirmaster, did it bother him?

MK: Oh, I'm sure, it was a heartbreak. He didn't reveal it though. He didn't have time; he had to create the new liturgy. He is a genius. Sometimes he was only two days ahead of us. He writes beautiful hymns, he does lovely hymns. He never has his name on them, only CW. Then he wrote all of those antiphons we use now. If it hadn't been for him, who knows where we would have been. The change was so fast. I used to ask him about it. Couldn't we sing a little Latin piece once in a while? But he never expressed his feelings.

Old Father Andrew used to say the Office in Latin in addition to the English one. When he died, I said to the choirmaster, "Why don't you give him an old Latin funeral?" But he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't make a concession. But the new choirmaster will sing something in Latin once in a while. Now we have a whole generation that doesn't know Latin.

SP: I thought you did Mass this morning with flair.

MK: Yeah, I like it. I enjoy doing Mass.

WOP: Would you encourage a young fellow to become a monk today?

MK: Oh yes, if he has any gifts for it. Now and then they come by. I suppose half of it is romantic. They like the liturgy, rubric, clothes. The life is still pretty ritualized, eating together all dressed up, and in a very particular mode, you know, sitting in choir, and I like all that. And that then becomes the platform, the staging place, that gets you started. The idea is to shake you free of the ways of the world, worldly clothes, not that that's sinful and evil, but it's worldly, but you drop all that and live another way. They do the same thing in the military; they give you different clothes, different protocol, rituals of all kinds, salutes. That becomes the platform against which the thing can take off. So our way makes possible an engagement with the world of the spirit. For some the style is as far as it goes. But that's standard. You know, you may have one hundred people that write poems, but one may actually be a poet. It takes the hundred to produce the one. The same with artists or singers or whatever. If you don't have all these mediocre ones you don't get the outstanding ones. So they are not mediocre in the sense that their contribution is very real.

WOP: What does it take today to make a good vocation?

MK: I think the faith is dying and I don't know why. I think the Church today, surely the monastic life, is in better shape than

it has ever been. We have good popes, good bishops, good priests, and beautiful buildings. Everything is there and I don't know why the faith is dying. I don't know what is going on. The monastic life has never been in better shape. It's as good now as it has ever been. It does have a few crazies, a lot of weird qualities.

Why, all of the sudden, are there no priest vocations here? I have theories. One is noise. I think their imagination is killed by constant input. Disney ruined fairy tales by putting them on screens. It's all passive, where before you read it and you imagined Cinderella and the pumpkin. And then they get constant input, getting more and more interesting and fascinating and more and more of it from dawn to dark. There is no silence, no time to ponder or reflect on anything and in that context religion dies.

What did people in this part of Kentucky do around here all day in the past? Nothing. For a long time there was no TV, no radio, no phonograph. Out in the fields all day it was quiet. What did they do for excitement? Go down and see the train twice a day, who gets on who gets off and pick up the mail. Made their day. Well, then they would be pious people, raised against a background of religion and they were Catholic and they went to Mass every Sunday and celebrated the feasts, the cycle of the year, so they had things to think about, and baptisms and weddings and funerals, you can see how emotion arises out of that kind of a background. I'm not condemning it, but it doesn't get into the kind of thing that produces poets.

The monastic life should be poetic, romantic, artistic, and introverted. Does it have any common sense? Extroverts want to serve God. They would do something. The world, God knows, is in trouble and needs help. And if you come here and spend your time singing the psalms and making fruitcake, it's crazy. Except, if you are an introvert, it isn't. Making cheese and fruitcake is just something that makes the contemplative life possible, you know, pays the bills. For us, the real world is within. That doesn't make us a superior people, it is just who we are.

As a Western culture, we are extroverts, and if you are not an extrovert, honey you won't make it. So you acquire extrovert

ways if you haven't got them. If your boy grows up and becomes eighteen and you ask him what he's going to do and he says he's going to be a poet, you ask, "What are you going to do for a living?" The best they can do is do what you do, where you can teach and engage in something very high quality and it pays the bills.

WOP: Our youngest daughter majored in philosophy and everybody asked, what are you going to do with that?

MK: Yeah, what are you going to do? How are you going to earn a living?

WOP: What kind of qualities in a person would make a good vocation here?

MK: You need to have a feeling for art and beauty and ritual, ceremony, and then, of course, a love for God, and a desire to commit yourself and give yourself away and abandon family life. It gives you a community where you can share a life of love, and it's disciplined and ascetical and that prevents it from becoming, you know, introverted. And meanwhile you help build something very beautiful, a city of peace and love and it's a great benefit to the world. Even if monks are romantic, they are always very practical. They were the first capitalists of Europe, building up businesses.

Today we get some inquiries, but every now and then someone who wants to be a monk and would obviously make a good monk comes by and we start asking a few impertinent questions. Well, he has a child up in Minneapolis; wouldn't that cause a few problems? Well, no, his mother has him. Then the other thing is that they owe thousands to the government for their education. It's so easy.

You know, people don't seem to marry anymore. They just live together. It's not good preparation for this place. Of course, being chaste and celibate in that world is asking a good deal. Then many of them are disenchanting with the Church. They are not what we used to be, traditional Catholics who loved the

Church and that was it. The Church has changed. Then they get mad at the local pastor, which is the Church locally. They don't fight the bishop or the pope, they do it at home. Catholics don't give the way Protestants do. They support the Church and they support religious orders, but they don't give like Protestants, as they used to. That's a sign that something is not right. There may be nothing critical said at home about the Church, but the kid picks it up, that being a priest is not at the top of the list. It's way down on a list, so it's not the first thing that enters their head. A monk goes home and his nieces and nephews don't know beans about the Church. They see the Church as something nice if you like it. Nothing against it. The pope is just wonderful. Everybody thinks Mother Teresa is just wonderful, but that's it. We have been through all this before. So you just hang on and make do and hope better times will come.

WOP: I used to hear people say that if someone was a good monk, he was a good community person.

MK: Yes, it would be essential. You have to like people because there is a type that thinks this is a good place to get away from people, but it's the worst place to come for that. Being a solitary won't work unless you can live in community. If you can't live with community you will never be able to live with yourself. Some think the problem is everybody else, all these creeps I have to live with. Well, the biggest creep is yourself. Those who don't know that never last when they do come here.

WOP: So, how do you see the future here?

MK: Positively, with qualifications. We Cistercians have been around nine hundred years. Looking at the statistics, it's a roller coaster, so it's just a matter of hanging on, that's all. This drop in vocations will pass; the monastic life will come back. In the third world it's different. In Indonesia, Africa, and Asia, the monastic life is doing very well. They have the faith. You don't feel like you are just wasting time; you feel like it's a contribution to the world in terms of faith. You haven't retired to the country in order

to nurse your wounds. It's a viable form of life; I would say it's as good as anything that's going on. And you need poets, and dramatists and singers and dancers and artists and monks. They are not practical. We were just reading today that Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria, threw out all of the contemplatives, closed their houses, took their property, put them on pensions, and got rid of them because they weren't practical. He would be typical of many people's mentality. When one of our abbots first entered here as a monk, his mother wrote and asked that he not be admitted. She thought he should do something practical like some kind of active ministry.

Yes, I have hope for the future. I'm not depressed. The monks aren't either. They have a sense of history. We are living in a house that has been here for 150 years. So it drops in numbers; we keep going.

WOP: Give us a summary of what Christian faith is. What is the gospel for you?

MK: To me it is the presence of God everywhere and in everything. That comes naturally for a Celt. Even as a child I could find God easily. And I can remember as a child wondering why people weren't nice when God was so good. I was already aware of the difficulties in the human situation: poverty and violence and human sinfulness. Why does this happen when the beauty of God is seen so clearly in nature and trees and birds, the things a kid is aware of? We always lived near the sea, and the ocean is wonderful for that openness to God. Loving your neighbor and so on follows from knowing the beauty of God. And the coming of Christ and his having pity on us. He came and joined us to get us to do good and he paid for it, but he turned it into joy. That made sense. I defend the missionaries, but that's not where I'm at. I can go out and preach the gospel, but it wasn't a passion for me the way it is for the pope. I would much sooner stay home and pray about it and think about it. More introvert than anything. My sister was an extrovert and she was more male than I was, more outgoing, more aggressive. She would stand up to my father and mother. When they gave an order she didn't like she

would defy them, but I was just the opposite. I was easy to please. Whatever they said I did. I just held my anger in, put up with it. Aggression doesn't come naturally to me. In high school competition was useless. I'm not that way; I don't know how. I had no ability in sports, which for a kid is devastating. I couldn't hit a ball, I couldn't do anything. I did single things: skate and run and swim and row a boat, but never competitively. Didn't know how to do it. That's a curse for a boy. So, actually, the SVD was good for me, even though not exactly my cup of tea. It forced me to be an extrovert, to engage and get involved. As long as it was sports I was hopeless, but when I got into college, I was editor of the paper, and I could act, and I could sing so I was always in the choir. I could get by on that. That makes you a valid member of the community. You didn't have to deal with basketball and baseball. So that's why I had a really happy time. So I edited the paper and put on plays.

I don't enjoy encounter and conflict. I go to pieces. I don't know how to do it. So you develop the skills, but they are false, artificial. They are contrived. Well you can do that at twenty-five and thirty and it's all right, but by the time you are forty it's different. Like when I was in New Guinea you sit down at the table for breakfast and you say, "I hear the bishop is getting a helicopter." Someone says, "Who told you that?" "Well," I say, "Let's see, who told me that. One of the brothers told me." The reply? "I knew that two weeks ago." You have a fight on your hands. I was just trying to be pleasant. But they like that, they enjoy it. Then when I came here, I took one look at the monks, you know, three o'clock in the morning, putting on pretty clothes and singing psalms, that's for me. You could see they were gentle, even then. And it got better all the time. But the preliminary of it was good for me because it forced me to develop another side too, so in a way it was providential. It's been a good trip.



# MONASTIC LIFE

## BEYOND GENDER

Although I never experienced it, I have heard from several of a phenomenon in earthquake country, such as along the major fault that runs through the South Pacific. One day, Australian volunteer John Hickey was working with the cattle in the plantation: thousands of tall, majestic palms like cathedral pillars in rows miles long, beneath in high grass are cows munching, mooing moodily to one another. The air is noisy with the cries of birds whose voices are as wretched as their plumage is gorgeous. All of a sudden there is perfect stillness. No cow moves, no bird calls. The change is startling. It is a silent church. Then, ten, twenty seconds later, the terrifying shake of the earth beneath you, a pan of Jell-O held by a nervous cook.

I think of that in these mysterious days of silence after Ascension, before the coming of the Spirit in power. So, too, before a tropical storm, the mad mix of orange and green and mauve clouds swirling dangerously, the suspicious lightness of the air, the hush, the hesitancy. And then before you know what has happened, the sky is black, and there comes a roaring gale of torrents of driving rain. A wild scene up out of nowhere. And it is all over in ten minutes. We are now in that hesitant edge, the moment when nothing happens and everything is about to. The great breakers rolling to shore, lips pursed, tons of water about to spill.

They are three: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. There is a modality that goes with each, a quality. Maybe we can muse a moment on mystery which no words can speak, no symbol signify.

Because we seem to be a patriarchal society, we tend to think of our religion as patriarchal. I am not so sure it is, though I as-

sume we are. We do call him Holy Father, after all, Pope John Paul. Papa Noster. It would be just as significant to call him Brother John Paul, Frater Noster. We have taken to calling the priest Father, though Brother is nice, maybe nicer.

The first way of seating in church is as in a hall, in a theatre, a classroom. All in neat rows facing toward the action, the source, at the elevated front. It goes well with God the Father, asserts the male principle, the idea of authority, control, truth, order, law and grace. For many, this is the Catholic Church, impregnable champion of orthodoxy, the greatest and oldest organization on the face of the earth. The way most of our churches are arranged says that. You tell us. We listen. We learn. We obey. And so we love and are loved.

Monks favor another way. We love God, but we know that love of God is one with love of neighbor. The truth is not in us unless we embrace both God and brother. So we face one another in God, in choir, in chapter, in refectory. This is no trifle. We take care to emphasize it. We are in constant living communion with our brother and so we know that we are face-to-face with God.

Because love of God and of brother means both toughness and tenderness, courage and tolerance, suffering and dedication, we are one with a Jesus who is not male principle, not female principle, but both: integrated, total human, perfect human. No artist ever sculpted a tough Jesus, painted a macho Lord. He is always tough tenderness, vulnerable strength. Model priest, prophet, poet, Christian, for all, young and old, male and female, single and married. The universal one. To monks religion is not patriarchal. It is fraternal, communal, brotherhood.

When we come to the Eucharist, it is something else again. Here we gather in a great circle around the altar, the center of the universe, the heart of all that is. In a great ring around the stone of sacrifice, priests and people are one with the angelic choirs who surround the throne of the eternal God singing undying praise. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is feminine fruition, the fulfillment of the dream. The gifts of the Spirit complete: understanding, knowledge, wisdom, counsel, piety, fortitude, fear. And the fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, mildness, faith, modesty, continence,

chastity. These follow the following of Jesus, prove its genuineness, Christianity lived, the Church vibrant with holiness, rich in the Spirit. In this earthly prelude we are joined in perfect love and so face God in total joy. It is a foretaste of the Kingdom.

Massive spectacles in great bowls and domes and stadiums are a gathering around a contest, highly stylized, often a kind of ballet. We ought not to miss the reason for the great pull these events have. They represent far more than is evident. They reveal unspoken hungers and thirsts and longings. They are a sort of lay liturgy of the struggle of good and evil, some subtle hint of the cosmic engagement in which we are all engaged. The stakes are eternal life.

When we gather around the altar to ponder and share the conflict of good and evil in the passion and death and rising of Jesus, we await the Spirit he promised, the Spirit that calls us beyond docility to the Master, beyond engagement in loving dialogue with brother and sister, to the final wholeness which is all creation ringed in a dance of love before Almighty God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## TALKING WITH GOD

I suppose it will not be too long before we have a computer screen at each desk in choir, with some central station that will program an Odd week and an Even week, complete with hymns, psalms, readings, and prayers. Then all, guests too, will have the right page and correct text, all without benefit of overhead light. So a soft blue will suffuse the choir, rather than, say, lights that make it look like high noon at night Vigils.

There is really nothing particularly remarkable in this, at least as an adaptation to choir stalls. It would be a marvelous achievement, though no more remarkable than a printed page

replacing a hand-lettered one, or even books at all, as compared with monks who knew the Psalter by heart. What is remarkable is that the thing should be there at all. We by familiarity may be much unaware of the wonder we are witness to.

We are accustomed to the fact that there is a group of men talking to God. Talking to God is prayer. The talk involves praise, adoration, thanks, petition, sorrow. Monastic prayer is prayer of a very particular sort, prayer that is a matter of total involvement. Here is no mere quiet, interior prayer—necessary to be sure—but prayer in common, in public. Brothers praying together to God. Aloud. In a special setting: not merely a church, but a monks' choir in a monks' church. They are vowed lifelong to God. They are in costume. The music is special. They form a hallowed tradition some 1,500 years old, laid out in great detail by St. Benedict, the father of Western monasticism. He began all this and it has never ceased. What else in the world is like it? Surely, only the sacraments of Holy Church surpass it. Granted that styles in the sacraments have changed some over the years, but they have not changed *that* much. There is a basic reality here that perseveres, and it is rooted in a Psalter that predates Christ, as we postdate him.

If we were to witness a choir of the deaf at the worship of God in the prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours, we would perhaps capture the impact we once sustained when we first encountered this scene. For the deaf could also line up in choir, take the places and change the dialogue of prayer by way of the psalms through sign language. Now this side, now that, bowing at the Gloria, sitting for the reading. It would be the silence that would strike us, the intensity of the communication from one choir to another. Brother praised God with brother. Mankind at prayer. As mankind, as brotherhood, as community, as Church. We would be struck by the beauty of the silent scene, and thus aware that as humankind, we pray.

While we can commune with God as with another in heart and mind and will, and surely reach the depths of the human heart and the heart of God, our usual manner of commerce is through sign and symbol, through word spoken and gesture made, through vesture and rite, stance and posture, holy place

and holy setting. We know and love the God of rain and of the starry night, of mountain and valley in bloom. But we need also to talk to God in words, make love to him through body, and find exceeding joy in doing so with others. We are family, community, and a family gathers before fireplace, around the table, at the altar.

Saint Benedict left to the West, to the world, a tradition of prayer, prayer of great beauty, prayer rooted in the mysteries of Christ's birth, his life and work, his death and rising, his sending of the Spirit and the founding of the Church to continue until his coming again at the end. It is total prayer in its sense of community and its being involved with every dimension: sound, sight, speech, song, ritual, vestment, setting. All that awakens in us this truth, that the life of faith is the same. God permeates, penetrates in all we do—work, reading, service, leisure. God is part of all, in all, and in all we love and serve Him.

It would no doubt take us by surprise if we should open the door of a church and once inside note a double line of men deep in prayer, expressed in sign exchanged back and forth across a choir. In silence. Its beauty would overwhelm us, men talking to God with one another.

No less awesome the sound of music, of chant, of psaltery, of men at prayer together for the joy of it, the glory of it, for one another, for the world, because there is a God. God be praised for this great gift so unmerited. That this fragile beauty should endure is a marvel of God's providence, and we are grateful. A gratitude more profound for our being called to be part of it, however unworthy; to be called to help make it possible, for it is a community enterprise. We are gathered by grace from here and there, for some long years ago, for some not long ago at all, and gifted for this splendid enterprise for the good of all mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. Praise be God for St. Benedict and for all who follow him. Amen.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is a firstfruit of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In 1843, Samuel Morse obtained use of the right-of-way along the new Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, between Baltimore and Washington, to erect wire for his telegraph. A year later this first message was tapped out, one letter at a time, "What hath God wrought." It was thought a marvel, and it was. Ever after there was a telegraph office in every railroad station. Communication is a most significant aspect of the human scene. We speak naturally, and from the dawn of speech we extend the faculty to unimagined dimensions.

Indian trails, waterways by river and canal, highways and throughways are a web covering the nation. From telegraph to telephone to radio to television to facsimile to electronic networks by cable and satellite, instant communication is possible to almost anywhere when a superb mail system will not suffice. We do love to stay in touch. From clay tablet to papyrus to parchment to paper, the written, printed word is endlessly multiplied. It must be in the nature of our kind to communicate.

It is the nature of God Almighty, too. So it is a godlike gift. The inner communion of God we call the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

When God would speak to us in a most appealing way, he moves beyond creation, beyond his omnipotence, his omnipresence, his dominion over all, in all, to the amazing length of the incarnation in which he sent his Son, the Word, the word of God. God speaks, and his Son is the Word he speaks.

Now, after Ascension, his mission has been accomplished through his life, death, and his rising from the dead. Christ ascends to his Father and promises the ultimate communication, which is the Holy Spirit—here all along, but now in a most dynamic, powerful, personal way.

A firstfruit of the Spirit's coming is speech. "They spoke in tongues the wonders of God." The *Magnalia Dei*. And they are

commissioned to go forth into all the world and speak the Good News.

Is it not remarkable that our response to all of this is the silent life? We are into a cult of quiet, the love of silence, the absence of communication. This gives one pause.

We need not have been in this monastery long to remember restrictions on mail to just a few times a year. And no phones, or with abbreviated dials. Not to mention visits limited to family, if possible, once a year. Here. Not there.

Styles and methods change, but what is current is still a very dramatic art form. There is another communication on another level, in a different strata, in a unique orbit. There is communication with God and with one another and with all the world which is in the grace of God, the life of God, the love of God, by means of which we enter into a communion as real as life and as hidden.

We do not know what life is. We know life only by signs, the signs of life. The inner life of God within is even more subtle, unexplainable. Yet no less real.

When we are in that channel, on that wavelength, on that route, we can reach further than any satellite, go as deep as deep can be.

Our silence says this. Glory to God for the marvels the human mind has created in spanning water with magnificent bridges, with mighty tunnels, sending our own kind to the moon and back, project equipment into almost infinite space to listen, to record, to photo—all to the glory of God.

Yet, to reach God is more. To hear God and to worship God is more. Infinitely more. This is the message of the quiet life. Listen! God speaks. He speaks to every human heart. Answer him, for God awaits a word of love.

## PURITY OF HEART<sup>1</sup>

I was walking down the cloister one day, came by Dom James' office, and on impulse thought I would drop in and let the abbot know how I was doing. I had been here a month or two, a youthful forty-five, fresh from an active mission order, dealing with a change of life. His reception was decidedly cool. I sensed something wrong. Where I came from you could see the rector or the provincial anytime, day or night.

I was told, no matter what you did in the Divine Word society, you don't just drop by the abbot. Certainly not after Prime. There is protocol. You may have done it where you were before, but you can't do it here anymore. I was a bit miffed. This man was rather pretentious. Any rector or provincial can do all he does and over far greater numbers, and wear no ring, no pectoral cross, carry no crozier, and get no profound bow when you meet. Time changed that when I understood better. You too will never understand that man unless you realize that his love for this abbey was a consuming passion. He was enormously proud of Gethsemani: what it meant, what it stood for. I got the impression that he thought the Catholic Church in America depended on Gethsemani.

It was that love that led him to throw his weight, sometimes gently, sometimes not, on a man he thought would make a good successor as abbot. Why not, pray? Should decades of experience be passed over, the wisdom born of years of service be dismissed? That violated common sense. Why should not an older man counsel a younger? He did this with a pure heart, a good conscience, as they say.

But the monks? Well, they have pure hearts, too. You can be sure they do not stoop to politics, maneuver, power play. That's beneath them. So they did not lean to favored ones. Not on purpose. Maybe not even consciously. Just by instinct, intuitively.

1. This sermon was preached on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the election of Abbot Timothy Kelly.

They turned their eyes, rather, on a rejected one. Now a few, then more and more. Not because he was the unfavored one—that would be gross—but because in their deeps they wanted one who was his own man. Stand on his own feet. A matter of gut feeling, of the deepest movement of the Spirit. The young abbot at the tiller in rough weather with the old one at his shoulder telling him when to bring the ship around—that was not a picture that appealed at all. The old one should be asleep in his cabin.

But not to spite Dom James, or go counter. No way. It was a deeper matter. At most you can say the former served only as a catalyst. He was the grain of sand that had no business being in the oyster, but was nonetheless cause of the pearl. He was the agent of God's will. That is the fruit of the pure heart, the lesson of the whole business.

The pure of heart are the vessels of God's grace, through which his will is done. Being right or wrong is not the issue. The pure of heart can be mistaken. But God's will can still be done through them. The cardinals with good heart elected John as a transitional pope in good faith, and so did the will of God. We know the fruit.

Having a pure heart seems to be the point and purpose of the monastic life. It is thought, of course, that this always leads right to action. But it doesn't; it leads to the will of God, for God can work through the pure. That's why we can love Protestants. We disagree with them theologically, but for the most part, surely, they are pure of heart. God's will would seem to be that we do penance for our sins by suffering divided Christianity.

When the young Canadian with the Basilians took to thinking about being a monk of Gethsemani, the good father and the good mother were not impressed. Not at all. No way. Good people, pure of heart. But, you are not to think the son became a monk to spite them, to show that he could do as he liked. Not at all. That's not the way it is done. Rather, parental opposition was a catalyst that drove the man inward to test his call, to search his heart and confirm his response to grace. The opposition deepened the desire because it questioned it, opposed it. But the response was triggered by the opposition, did not cause it. That would be crude and would never wear anyway.

So when young Kelly crossed the international border, the flag on his father's lighthouse station near Windsor flew at half-mast. The mother fumed privately. When he later became abbot, she was more convinced than ever that the whole business was absurd.

You would serve God? Then cultivate the pure heart. Play clean, from the most profound motives. Be barren of pride, of ambition, of self-serving, of play for power, place, position. There is no good in any of that. God cannot operate well in a fouled-up network. The pure of heart can be in error, make mistakes. True enough. No one ever said grace guaranteed success. All we know is that the pure of heart are God's chosen. So we are grateful to Dom James. In ways he was not counting on, he was the agent who perhaps, more than anyone or anything else, began what we celebrate today. We are grateful to him. But our deepest thanks go to Almighty God for what we have received. I hope that the gratitude will encourage us all to foster the pure heart that gives joy to God and brings about his will among us.

His will among us is to do great good. We are prone to identify God's will with tragedy and disaster: fire, earthquake, tornado, famine, plague. We have no other way to cope. But God favors beauty over trial and trouble, yet lacks pure hearts through which to do it. In the pure heart we have the way to blessings, joyous ones. It is no small thing to be agents of such good and to reap the fruit of it too. God prosper the pure heart.

Thank you, Father Timothy. It has been a good trip. God bless you.

## **A HOPEFUL FUTURE**

The proceedings of the last convention of the American Catholic Theological Society makes excellent light reading before

you fall asleep at night. The booklet is not heavy and is easy to hold, but the material is quality.

Here, for example, is the present new generation as described by the experts:

prone to individualism, relativism, privatism in religion.

searching for community.

religiously illiterate, lacking vocabulary or concepts of being a Catholic.

strong orientation toward voluntary service, but not seen as related to the Church.

If this is our people today, if this is our young people, I daresay there is room for hope.

Privatism, individualism, are very American. We have coped with them for generations, all the way from private interpretation of Scripture to private enterprise in business. Our culture stresses the competitive, the individual. So, that is nothing new.

Quite contrary to that is search for community. That too, remarkably, is very American. From Amish to Hutterites, to Amana, Brook Farm, Quakers, Shakers, Oneida, to New Harmony, community is deep in our psyche.

That we are religiously illiterate is the fruit of public education and Catholic inadequacy. But it is not irremediable. It can be helped. People can learn.

An orientation toward service is beautiful. That it is not identified with the Church is a mark of ignorance and maybe of fear. But it is a great quality.

If you put the whole together, the picture is not grim. A culture of divorce will necessarily result in a generation that trusts nothing, that has no confidence in any structure, not after the love that created you has died, has split. It takes no structure seriously. When the fundamental structure of society—the family—collapses, love for Church or any social or spiritual body will come hard. But it can come; it can be experienced.

The Church is essentially community. And in the Church, how many communities: parochial, diocesan, international, monastic. All kinds. This is our best point, our chief quality.

Let this be known and experienced. If any knew the joy we have in this monastic community—yet, how can you tell anyone? It must be experienced. The desire is there; the hunger is surely a great good.

If we have a generation illiterate in matters of faith, that is not necessarily permanent. Instructing the ignorant is a spiritual work of mercy. We can open doors, share what we have, open our books, invite to choir, welcome at the Eucharist. These are all at once spiritual and educational.

The response to a call to service is surely a reason for hope. The Church is rich in mercy. Its works of charity are phenomenal, but also not well known. The Church is everywhere, even in remote distant lands. Harry Jacobs goes mountain climbing in the Himalayas of Nepal and runs into Sisters of Nazareth from Bardstown. The young go abroad or to the inner city or Andalusia and find the Church already there before them. So if we can make the identification of Christ/Church/Service, all will come together.

So putting it together, I'd say the situation is encouraging, no matter now discouraging it looks at the moment.

Vocations are not scarce. Vocations are as abundant as ever. It is the response that is weak or lacking or misunderstood.

The power of prayer is great. It has a way of opening eyes, clarifying vision, suggesting options, revealing secrets.

This monastery has been way up and way down. We have been down to thirty and up to two hundred monks or more. They were going to close it once, maybe twice.

Worldwide and in history the scene has been even more chaotic: the Black Death, the Protestant Reformation, the Hundred Years' War, the French Revolution, and how many others. Napoleon and Emperor Joseph and the Church itself passed out commendatory abbacies<sup>2</sup> to favorites. Every country in Europe has turned on the Church from time to time, and monasteries

2. A commendatory abbot was a distinguished cleric or noble who was made abbot of a monastery by papal or royal decree, without becoming a monk or living in the monastery. He would be custodian of the revenues of the abbey, while the monks were left in the care of the prior.

were easy targets. Yet we Cistercians have been around for nine hundred years. Not much has been around that long.

So we live in hope. Hope on. Trust God. Pray more. Look to a glorious future. We have been here at Gethsemani for 150 years. We're just getting started.

There is a lot of good in the young, even if it is mixed with darkness. That seems to me more or less the way it's always been. Amen.

## THE PRIMACY OF THE SPIRITUAL

*Luke 10:1-7*

Joseph II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, left his name in history in Josephism, the name given to his gross interference with the running of the Church. He was into everything from sacristy to sanctuary, to seminary to cemetery. His grasp of the faith was shallow and pathetic. He is especially remembered by the Cistercians, for he is responsible for the split in our order. He would have no contemplative monks in his kingdom unless they did something practical and useful. In order to survive the monks began schools. They still have them, renowned, of prestige, but they are not really our thing.

We are not practical. We are not useful. We are not into any ministry save hospitality, and that is not ministry as much as courtesy. We are an art form, and as an art form, somewhat exaggerated, as is all art. In order to make a point, let me make an emphatic statement.

What is the statement? The primacy of the spiritual. This monastery makes no sense except spiritually. All we do, all we have, all we are says one thing: there is more to life than what you see. There is more than getting and spending, coming and going. There is a lot more.

We like drama, poetry, song and dance, music. These may have no particular practical value, but are of enormous significance to the human spirit. The world would perish without them. Life would be a desert waste with no poets and dreamers, priests and prophets, monks and mystics.

This is the point that Jesus makes in the gospel portion this morning. The harvest is rich, so pray for the workers. Spread peace. Carry the word. Spread the news everywhere. Don't worry about equipment and finances, tools and wherewithal. Put first things first; the rest will follow. No fuss over clothes and food. Carry the Good News. Spread it worldwide. If they will not listen, waste no time with them, be gone. There are others waiting to hear you. They will house you, feed you, clothe you, sustain you.

So it has been, is now, ever will be. How many great spiritual enterprises began with no more than an idea and the grace to carry it out? The whole Christian enterprise began with One Person and his twelve disciples. Every religious order began with one person with no resources, no money, no wherewithal. Without exception, the rest all followed. Trust in God and go ahead. The rest will come. Always has. Still does.

The power of the Spirit is enormous and sets into motion great movements of mercy, love, and compassion. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, instruct the ignorant, heal the sick. Wherever Christ goes, wherever the Church goes, the good works follow. They are the concrete expression of this love.

But the first thrust, the main impact, is in the spirit. Christianity is not humanitarianism. If the love of God is not in the good works, they are no more than dole and handout.

Christ often used the emphatic statement to make a point: if your hand offends, cut it off. If your eye would be evil, cut it out. Better one-eyed in heaven than full vision in hell. So today: never mind extra sandals, wasting time in casual chatter on the way. No need of a purse full of money, a bag full of clothes. Granted you are sheep among wolves, fear not: I am with you. Preach the word. Drive out demons of doubt and despair. Speak love. Live peace. The rest will follow.

We have been here 150 years. We probably have not made a convert in all that time. No. The conversions follow elsewhere. We sow the seed. We be the witness. We testify to the light. The rest follows. First things first. Seek the Kingdom. The rest will follow.

Hapsburg Joseph is still around in a lot of people without the vision that faith gives. Yet the world itself is testimony to the purpose of a creating God.

God made all for joy, to reveal his glory, to express his delight. We are called to share in it with the same delight, the delight manifest in bug and bird, in lotus and lily, in seeing, hearing, taste and touch. How practical is the rainbow? And if God is so impractical, it is no wonder his works are. We can share his joy, enter it. We can do better than the Hapsburg.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

*Matthew 5:1-11*

*Luke 6:20-26*

People who live by the sea are not too apt to pay a great deal of attention to it, save what is practical and useful: high tide, low tide, a stormy day, a quiet one. The same is true of those who live in the mountains, in a lovely valley, or any locale a visitor would find remarkable for beauty. Such a visitor is likely to think the inhabitants live on a constant high level of awareness of what is around them. Not necessarily so. Sometimes yes, now and then.

Yet on another level, they are continually aware. They never forget. They are always subject to the influence of the lovely around them. The impact of such awareness can be stronger than an occasional conscious attentiveness, or even a persistent one because we are more unconscious than conscious. There is more

of one than the other, and we are always being influenced by the greater.

Children of our day can be very violent, not because they are necessarily more violent than those of another day, but because they are submitted to a heavy assault of stimulus to violence from many quarters. We are affected by what we see, what we hear, what we read, by what goes on around us. This is true not only on our conscious level, but even more so on our unconscious level. The darkness of the human psyche is not that difficult to arouse, to stimulate.

Though we perhaps avert little specifically to it, we are as monks submitted to an onslaught of positive, spiritual, beautiful influences. We are profoundly affected by them all. The modest amount of attention that monks give to choir, for example, is not the sum of what choir does to them. The repeated exposure to such power and grace, day after day, night after night, for years on end, has far more influence on the monk than he is aware of, just as his influence on others is at once both hidden and enormous.

So we think thoughts of mercy, of pardon, or forgiveness. We live in a climate of love by choice. As Christians we take pains to express this any way we can. The healing of a wound is not the mere application of a dressing and taking a few pills. Every aspect of body and soul, not to say the world around us, is involved. Holistic indeed.

It is good to have trust in all of this. We are truly embraced by the merciful Christ and we live in a country of mercy. It is not imagination or pious fancy. It is not just a pleasant thought, it is reality. Now and then, here and there, we avert to it. Like a stranger coming among us and saying, "What a beautiful place this is." We may almost catch ourselves and respond, "Yes, come to think of it, it is."

The photographer here for the visit of the Dalai Lama was about to board the helicopter back to Lexington when he told the pilot, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Let me pull myself together. I have never in my life seen anything as impressive, as beautiful, as what I have just seen. It literally swept me off my feet." And he held his head in his hands.

We live surrounded by such marvelous beauty, and only now and then do we stop to notice it. The healing process never ends.

Years ago monasteries like this were fond of printing sayings of Christ, like the Beatitudes, on the walls of public rooms. Sometimes they were just painted, sometimes, as in Conyers in Georgia, they were cast in cement in the very structure of the chapter room or refectory. No doubt, after some time, no one notices them. Only visitors do. Maybe! Unspoken messages come to us all in many ways, even in what we see and hear day after day. It is good to note the voice of mercy. It is always present.

We are aware enough of the need for a peaceful womb for a child, for excitement, worry, noise, will all affect the growing child in serious ways. We know, too, the beauty of advantaged children brought up in a home of urbanity, good breeding, pleasant surroundings, culture.

So we try in whatever way we can to create a good climate in ourselves, in our inner life of peace, avoiding sin and evil tendencies and cultivating mercy, love, patience, and peace. This can be done in the most discouraging circumstances. It is the point of mercy, of grace. There are people who become beasts in the concentration camp, and people who become saints.

Environment does not create saints, but it sure helps. Not all who emerge from lovely homes are lovely people, and there are wise souls of stature in the slums.

The point remains: in the grace of God we can do far more than we dream possible. It is the basic Christian witness.

## **LAST MASS AT OXFORD**

*John 13:31-35*

Last Sunday I attended the last Mass at the monastery in Oxford, North Carolina. It was founded thirty years ago by a

French Benedictine, Peter Menard, on loan from St. Martin's in Liguge, France, to be temporary novice master at a new monastery in New York State, Mount Savior. Finished there, he dreamed of a racially integrated, small foundation. He was much distressed at the state of black Catholics in this country.

He begged funds and built a little plan of a central cottage, several separate cells, a pretty chapel, and a workshop on land belonging to the Diocese of Raleigh. It had an up-and-down history for a few years, until he developed cancer and had to return to France. He passed it on to some American Benedictines who had it for a while. They gave it to the Cistercians, Gethsemani for three years and then Spencer in 1973 until now. After the Mass there was a picnic under a pavilion which attracted about one hundred friends and neighbors. It was obvious that the place was loved while it lasted.

It did not last. So, do you write it down as a failure? Maybe. What is failure? Not being there at all? Or not staying very long? Is a short life a failure and a long one a success? Do losers never win, do prizes go only to the proficient?

Which brings us to today's gospel passage. It surely was put in writing only long after Pentecost and after much pondering of the mystery of Christ. For on the face of it Jesus' statement, "now is the Son of Man glorified," is outrageous. It is Holy Thursday night. They have just celebrated the paschal meal. To it were added some ominous blessings of the bread and the cup, ominous because they spoke of body as broken bread given, of wine offered as blood. Can the disciples have grasped what he meant? And then his talk of glory, he who in a few hours would be prostrate in prayer and sweating blood for the next day. Then betrayed and scourged and crowned in ignominy, passed over in favor of a criminal, dressed immodestly, and led to a hideous death. His followers gone. "Now is the Son of Man glorified." "Bears all the mark of failure," might be a more apt observation.

But we know what follows; the work of God is manifested. Failure becomes triumph. Death makes resurrection possible.

The conclusion is obvious. Human success and human failure, when measured against Christ, are something else again.

Grace works in darkness and in light, in failure and success. We never know how or why, or even when.

The only way out of the dilemma is the way of love. His talk of glory was followed by an admonition to love. Love is the key. This is the measure. This is the salvation of the world. Success or failure not. It is a deep lesson for our pondering. Amen.

## THANKSGIVING DAY

A few months ago a large truck parked overnight on the end of the front avenue. I came out of the chapel, saw the truck and trailer, and asked the man who at the moment came out the retreat house door, "Is that your trailer?"

"Yes, it is."

"And what do you have aboard?"

"Indians."

"And is Massasoit one of them?"

"Yes, he is. I have twelve of them. You have eleven to go."

It turned out that he was a driver and lecturer for a traveling exhibit of twelve historic Indians, life-size mannequins, fully and authentically dressed, set up in large plastic cases. He tours the country: malls, fairs, schools, campuses, announced ahead in the paper, sponsored by the Encyclopedia Britannica. I told him I had been trying for years to get a Britannica here and was always quoted Merton who said, "There had been no real Britannica since the eleventh edition." So, we never got one. "No worry," he said. "I have three sets, I'll send you one." And he did. In memory of Massasoit.

It was Massasoit who got the Plymouth pilgrims through the first year and to the harvest feast in celebration of the first Thanksgiving in 1621. They had four turkeys and corn, squash, pumpkins, and cranberries. The custom continues.

Thanksgiving is elemental. Fundamental. The Eucharist is thanksgiving. But the Eucharist, like all prayer, is fourfold: adoration, petition, atonement, thanksgiving. All of these are necessary for complete prayer. That is what makes thanksgiving possible. We are grateful to God for everything.

Once after supper at recreation years ago, I said to gruff, hearty Father Weyland, "It's a lovely day." He growled back at me, "Every day is lovely." I countered, "Surely, some are more lovely than others and God must appreciate your noting it."

Yet, for all that, he might be right. All that comes from God is lovely, and we are thankful for all. When Hurricane Hugo was on the way, Mrs. Kline wrote from New Jersey to say, "Thank God it is not headed here, but further south." Next day she wrote again, "What a terrible thing to say. I did not mean it."

Was Abbot Francis Kline in South Carolina grateful for Hugo? Was anyone? I daresay most people take what comes from God and waste no time complaining, but get busy cleaning up the mess.

It is good to follow the old pious phrase about the "adorable will of God," and unite the adoration of God to accepting his holy will, whatever it be. The AA prayer says it perfectly: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

Accepting the will of God is not passive. That is why uniting it to petition and atonement is so sound. We cannot use the will of God as a cover for helplessness. We cannot sink into self-pitying misery as the will of God. This is the fruit of anger and resentment. We ask God's help, we acknowledge that as sinners we have a guilt that has made the world a communal experience of penance.

There is a kind of docility that is much a part of our life in God. There seems to be a time in God's plan that we may not take to.

When I was eighteen, I entered a seminary, a minor seminary actually, for I lacked Latin and Greek. It was of a missionary order. I really was looking for monastic life, did not know it, and was not aware that there were monasteries. Twelve years of

public school exposed me to the medieval Church, but not to much of the contemporary scene. I was thus drawn to an order, missionary or not, rather than to the diocese. Later on, when I was better informed, I told the fathers of my monastic interest. They discouraged me as a most unlikely prospect for the monastic life. I accepted that. Later on, in college years, I mentioned the matter to my director and was told that such a life was not suited to me. Very well. Once a novice, then in vows, I laid aside any monastic fantasies as disloyal and a lack of commitment.

But now and then I would be haunted. One of the workers at the seminary joined the monastery in Rhode Island. Later, one of the Divine Word fathers joined Gethsemani, but a few years later returned when war made any Philippine foundation impossible, his dream and the abbot's. But I was much troubled.

The years went by and nothing ever came of a youthful dream. Then, some years later, a combination of items—a disastrous fire in which I was almost caught, a change in policy with the magazine I edited, and I was adrift in midterm. No specific obligations for this brief moment—rare in religion, or anywhere else for that matter—and I thought, here is your chance. It will never come again, not when you are forty-five.

So, I came here, I looked, I liked, I asked. I was released from the Divine Word Society and admitted to the Cistercians with small enthusiasms on either side. I did not care. It turned out to be a rough road, but the right one, in 1960.

The point is, things have their time. One is not to force, to insist. As it turned out, my action background and training, my mission exposure and experience, my community life for twenty-five years, all were great assets.

If God wills it, it will come. Patience is prayer, too.

We adore God. We thank God, and we thank him for everything. We petition our God because we have needs. We need him to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We acknowledge we are sinners who deserve far more than the crucifixion Jesus got, and so take what comes and get going.

Dorothy Day saw as much of the seamy side of life as many and far more than most. She asked for two words on her tombstone: *Deo Gratias*. Thanks be to God. God sent Massasoit to

the pilgrims in desperate need and a Britannica to those who could use it. He is not beyond helping us, for thanksgiving is graceful.

## ALL SAINTS' DAY

Some centuries down the times to come I envision Cistercian monks coming from, say, Malaysia, to probe the ruins of Gethsemani Abbey. These would-be archaeologists would have known that this continent was devastated by some nuclear disaster, seemingly accidental, centuries earlier, and was therefore until now wholly inaccessible. Now it was safe. And though they knew there were several abbeys in the land, Gethsemani was the first, best known, and best documented. They wanted to see if they could find the saint's grave. They eventually located the place by following the dry bed of the Ohio River and learned much, confirmed much.

They ran into problems, however, when they discovered the sealed cave in the cliff at the edge of the bottom, and could not account for it. One knowledgeable monk who had read the ancient literature declared it was a bomb shelter, not, as they first supposed, a cheese cellar. In fact, he said, some of the monks were displeased with it and said they would not use it with other people in the area helpless. The abbot told them in reply, so the story goes, that it was fully justified because, "the Church needs us."

One of the spiritually astute among them declared that the abbot of old was right; the Church did need them.

Such a fantasy, while admittedly unlikely to take place, is, as you know well enough, also admittedly very possible. If the thought gives rise to considerations fitting the end of the year and the end of all things, it also helps us in our response to All Saints.

Is there any significance for the world or the Church in a group dedicating itself to a life of prayer, to singing psalms, to offering the sacrifice of the Mass, and pursuing the quiet life? One would think so.

The Church does not exist without Christians, for that is what the Church is. Christ is indeed present on the earth, even in the earth, as the cosmic Lord of history, but his place of privilege is in the hearts of the people. Without them, he is not here as Redeemer. Without them his work of redemption is not accomplished.

A group of monks is not the Church nor the Christian world. Rather, they are a significant expression of the Church and the Christian life and, as significant, signify the whole. We can speak of the Church in this context as the Mystical Body of Christ, of all who love God as they can. It is through them with Christ that the world is redeemed. A monastery, the monastery of Gethsemani, is significant because every Christian, everyone who loves God, is significant. Through them all, Christ saves all, please God.

When we ponder this truth we perhaps reach the ultimate expansion of the call of our believing. To accept the annunciation, the birth, the life of teaching and healing, the passion, death and rising of Jesus, his sending of the Spirit, the founding of the Church, all as objects of our faith can be managed with the grace of God without great difficulty. They are all of them historic events with named people in known places. But when we move on to the mystical presence of God on earth we begin to touch something quite beyond our grasp.

There are literally billions now on earth with us. How many of them are Catholic? We can at least estimate. How many know God, love him, serve him, we have no way of knowing. And how many in ways subtle and ill-defined truly seek him is far beyond our ken. We are dealing with astronomic numbers even when considering merely our contemporaries here on earth. We cannot cope with the numbers here before us and now gone into eternity, or those yet to come. They all live, and hopefully, all live with God through Christ and are united with him. Or will one day.

There is no notion that so taxes our mind for sheer magnitude of scope. We believe, in the grace of God, that our union

with Christ has meaning for all who live and are united with us in grace for the Kingdom.

Though I do not suggest that we ought to strain our imagination in trying to objectify all this, I do feel in some way that we ought to be conscious of it. We tend inevitably to underestimate our role as Christians, let alone as monks, not just because we have a modest view of ourselves and should not be pretentious, but because we do not reckon that the one we love and serve is Jesus Christ, Son of God Almighty, redeemer of the world, savior of all.

Joy, then, is the first sequel to these notions, the first derivative. What greater joy could there be than to participate in some drama of eternal meaning for all who live? We do so in faith. That faith is made articulate by vow, by virtue, by good word, good deed, by the consecrated life of service, by where we live, by what we wear, what we eat and what we do all day and why.

“Eye has not seen,” nor do we expect it to, and “ear has not heard,” nor do we count on it to do so, nor has it entered the human mind to conceive “what God has prepared for those who love Him,” and for those whom they love. It is all in faith. Without that faith we are still in darkness and sin and the whole world absurd and meaningless, sick with violence and hate. With that gift we accomplish in Christ salvation in this world and the world to come. Amen.

## COME AND SEE

*John 1:35-42*

The gospel today is on the call and first response to the call. As happens so often, it begins with a question and a wrong answer. The two disciples followed Jesus when He was pointed out as the “Lamb of God” by John the Baptist. Jesus saw them

following him and so asked, "What are you looking for?" They did not answer, but instead asked another question, "Rabbi, where do you stay?" To which he responded with an invitation, "Come and see." It was an exchange of enormous significance, and they never forgot it. They remembered even the time of day it took place. "It was about four in the afternoon."

Most people who are called have a sense of some important desire which is lost in memory. But they can tell you easily enough the time and place they first acted on it. The matter used to be called vocation. In years past a great stress was placed on whether or not one had this impulse born of God, this inner spiritual awareness of being summoned to God's service. The discernment of the qualities of this call, how it was to be interpreted, how intense an experience it was, grew very complex. At times it outweighed what other qualities might be assumed more or less essential in a call, in favor of the call itself. In the end, an overwrought concern settled for the actual call of the bishop to ordination or of the superior to vows, to be the vocation. Anything less than that was preliminary, was preparation, offering.

Today, with few offerings being made to bishops or superiors, the discussion seems a bit academic. Yet the question does arise, is God still calling?

Are we to assume that no candidates or few means no vocations, or few? Does God withhold his favors on occasion? What are we to make of the fact that despite the need for workers, we see little response? My feeling, perhaps yours, is that the call goes out, but they are few who answer.

A culture needs men of God, women of God. A Catholic culture needs priests, brothers, sisters, monks, and nuns. A culture, Catholic or not, needs poets, writers, dramatists, dancers, prophets, actors, singers. What if they are not forthcoming or in short supply? I suppose one could issue a great deal of promotional literature, make facilities for training available, reward excellence with recognition and honors. All with help. You could import from overseas to stimulate the local appetite and emulation. Yet, it is clear from the outset that such artists are in good supply when they are appreciated and recognized. No writer, singer, actor, or musician could survive without recognition.

It is just possible that our people no longer appreciate what they have in the Church and its servants. If there are observable trends in average Catholic lives which are at odds with serious Catholic teaching, it is not too difficult to assume that a certain disenchantment will color a response to the local Father. Such a response need never be vocal or explicit to have power and influence. The young will read it with ease: the service of God does not rate a high priority.

This is not to say that styles do not change. They do, and people change with styles. The Catholic laity are no longer immigrants or first generation. They have moved up on the social scale as all good Americans do. They are not only—many of them—well educated, but better educated than many clerics. Though sisters as a group are a well-educated body of women, well-educated women are far more numerous today. So the approach of nuns is somewhat different, more mature, perhaps, less subservient.

The Father is different too. He prefers not to take privilege for granted from police, clerical discount for all his purchases, a tip of the hat from the passersby, better transport, housing, attire than the average. All these went out with the biretta. They are not in vogue. Moreover, the role is cast in a new mode. The priest today is spiritual master, director of souls, part of a team of competent experts in the matters of the spirit. More good preaching is essential, not exceptional. He will be admired not for building or fundraising, which others can do, but for good liturgy and for social concern. So the casting is for a new kind of man, and he emerges in response to need, to demand.

What makes for poets is people who read poetry. Musicians thrive when people like music. Artists flourish where art is appreciated. Songs are written and are sung to people who want to hear them and sing them. Priests abound when there are people who want them, love them, need them, and know it.

The burden on priests is enormous, for not only do they move into new modes, but often have to face the diffident or the hostile who has an argument with God, a bone to pick with God's Church.

For all that, great things go on and great good is done. If you wring your hands, spare yourself. There is a spiritual ferment in

our midst and it is of gigantic proportions. We need to move into affirmation for priest and altar, love for the word of God and the one who preaches it, love for superb liturgy and sacred art and good music and social concerns. This is a favorable climate for priests.

When Dom James years ago in the late 1950s came to the conviction that there would be no stopping a new world movement for a liturgy in one's own language, he moved effectively. Early on, in Advent, 1960, he introduced the lay brothers to an English office choir style. In one act he prepared the brothers who would want to join the monk's choir and at the same time gave occasion to experiment by a living model that was certain to come, an English liturgy. He had no doubt of it and was right.

He could not have been surprised when monks were not interested in the pope's plea to keep the old Latin liturgy in monasteries. Keeping alive an antiquity had no appeal. So the ground was plowed and harrowed in view of what was to come. There was a receptive, welcoming climate that made a nine-hundred-year-old heritage something whose time had come, whose noble service was over.

It is the supportive climate that makes flowers bloom and artists grow. I suppose that if there are not enough priests, it is that they are not wanted badly enough. There is not enough love for them.

We have always had a few monks whose families did not think highly of their calling, but by and large we are loved. We are a breed who needs love. And who does not?

Jesus' call, then, in the gospel is weighted. It is a personal call to the individual—"from now on you shall be called Peter"—but it is a call also to the whole body who will support him in his call. The very love of the servant becomes the very love of his Master who called him.

## CHANGE

For the past ten years or so I have been offering Mass each day after Vigils in the chapel, with the Roman Canon, sung according to the music printed at the rear of the Missal. You would think, wouldn't you, that others might take up the practice—not of a daily Roman Canon, or after Vigils, but sung? Granted that we do not have an abundance of priests, but some of them can sing as least as well as I. No takers. Why? One could take it personally and say, "Well, no one takes up any idea I suggest." But that would be silly. And incorrect. It's more a generic thing, characteristic of communities, especially religious communities. They tend to be conservative, are traditionally oriented, don't relish change. Least of all being trendy.

When Brother Roger was here last, he told me that he was working awhile for his brother, a sign-maker.

"Ah!" I said. "That's great. I wonder if he works in neon."

"Yes, he works with neon."

"Fine, I have an idea. I'd like a large cross in blue neon on the water tower on the hill. You know, it looks like a mighty Easter candle. We could Easter-candle it and mount a long strip of blue neon up and down, and a strip across for a cross. And the year 2000 at the center. Maybe an Alpha and Omega at the end of the cross arms. Could he do that?"

"Sure, he could do that. No problem."

"For the millennium, you know. So people going by wouldn't think of the place as a school or state prison. How much, do you think?"

"Oh, a couple of thousand."

So, I submitted it to the council. It didn't even make the minutes. So, it's personal? They don't take up the suggestions I offer? No, not at all. It's generic. They don't cotton to new ideas. They resist innovations. It's characteristic.

Christ's encounter this morning at Capernaum is revealing. A group had gathered in the house where he was staying. He was giving them the Good News he came to proclaim when they

brought a young paralytic to him, hoping he would heal him. But they couldn't get close enough to ask him. So, they climbed up on the roof, removed the tiles and lowered the paralytic to a place close to his feet. Christ would have been somewhat amazed, or more likely amused, at their determination. He looked with affection on the youth and told him, "Be of good heart, for I forgive your sins."

The scribes prominent in the gathering reacted in character, distressed at this unheard-of presumption. They raised their eyebrows, gave each other knowing looks. They pursed their lips and nodded knowingly. Christ need not have read their minds. He had only to look at their faces.

"The man blasphemes! Who can forgive sin but God alone?"

Their generic reactions blinded them to the obvious. If only God can forgive, maybe he is God. "Which is easier: to heal or to forgive?" He said to the youth, "Get up and go home." High drama in a low room packed with a delighted audience who rubbed it into the traditionalists. "We've never seen anything like this, have we now?"

We are going to be electing a new abbot for this house in a month or two. It surely cannot be out of place to suggest that some concern over our own generic tendency to stick to what we are used to will need some deft handling.

Hopefully, we shall elect an abbot even better than the one we had. We stiffen that hope with prayer. That hope being somewhat unrealistic, we pray that at least we get one as good as what we have had.

Yet one thing is certain. Whether he is better than what we had or as good or far worse, he will assuredly be different. And his being different will require some openness, some give in your stance, some limber in your muscle, if you are going to survive. Your commitment is going to have to go deeper than a mere comfortable content with what you are used to, a deep submission to God's will revealed in his providence.

Which, after all, is an application of faith common to all. Conformity to God's will is the key to happiness. Any generic inertia that resists change can lead us far astray, as it led the scribes to what is to be avoided at any cost. Better bend than

break, better keep flowing rather than freeze. No skyscraper ever broke in the wind: they bend. No vowed life ever lasted without supple love. Amen.