

HOMILY AT THE MASS FOR FATHER M. LOUIS (THOMAS MERTON)

*by Father M. Flavian Burns, Abbot of Gethsemani*

*11 December 1968*

My dear Fathers and Brothers,

Last week we buried one of our older Brothers, Brother Leo, a serious man who lived a long and silent life for the Lord. Today we celebrate this Mass on the occasion of another Brother's passing to the Lord, our own Father Louis.

This was a younger Brother, even a boyish Brother, one who could have lived a hundred years without growing old.

His life was far from silent, despite his hermit bent, since he was, in God's Providence, an artful minister of the Word. The world knew him from his books, we knew him from his spoken word. Few, if any, knew him in his secret prayer.

Still, he had a secret prayer and this is what gave the inner life to all he said and wrote. His secret was his secret to himself to a great extent, but he was a skillful reader of the secret of the souls that sought his help. It was because of this that although we laughed at him, and with him as we would a younger Brother, still we respected him as the spiritual father of our souls.

Those of us who had the privilege and pleasure to deal with Father Louis on intimate terms, and submit our inner lives to his direction, know that in him we had the best of Spiritual Fathers.

He was then both a Brother and a Father, and to those who wished it, he was also a faithful friend. To me, personally, he was one of the most helpful and lovable men that I have ever had the pleasure to meet. I owe him more than words can say. His passing is a great loss.

However, we know that it is not a complete loss. He has left his mark deep in this community, and it will be with us for years to come, for he has planted it in the hearts of a generation, and God willing, it will be planted again for generations to come.

Each of you, I am sure, would read his message somewhat differently and this, of course, is the way he would have it. But the message is basically the same for all.

We are men of God only insofar as we are seeking God, and God will only be found by us insofar as we find Him in the truth about ourselves. Silence, solitude and seclusion are means to this and nothing more. The end of all is purity of faith and love and the thing that keeps us going is our hope.

Father Louis undertook this trip to Asia in the spirit of this same quest for God. His letters to me from there were buoyant with hope for further progress in this quest.

The possibility of death was not absent from his mind. We spoke of this before he set out-- first jokingly, then seriously. He was ready for it. He even saw a certain fittingness in dying over there amidst those Asian monks, who symbolized for him man's ancient and perennial desire for the deep things of God.

Therefore, although he has died away from us in body, he did not die away from us in spirit. His death may be painful for us, but it is joy for him, for it is the fulfilling at long last of the quest for God and the hope in God which was his.

May God reward him then for all that he has done for this community, and may the quest for God, and hope in God, which was his, remain on now in us, that we too may share with him some day the joy of fulfillment in the Kingdom of our Father.

This we ask through Christ Our Lord and through the intercession of His holy Mother. Amen.

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