

THE PASSAGE OF ABBOT JAMES FOX

--by **Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O.**

The spirit of Gethsemani may be summed up in its favorite phrase --

“*All for Jesus - through Mary - with a smile.*”

--Dom James Fox, *Gethsemani Magnificat* (1949)

Born at Dedham, Massachusetts: 10 December 1896

Graduated Harvard University: 1918

Entered Passionist Novitiate: 12 April 1921

Made Simple Temporary Vows: May 1922

Made Simple Perpetual Vows: May 1925

Entered Abbey of Gethsemani: 18 January 1927

Solemn Vows at Gethsemani: 19 May 1929

Ordained to the Priesthood: 5 April 1930

Appointed *Superior* of Holy Spirit: 19 March 1944

Elected *Abbot* of Holy Spirit: 12 June 1946

Elected *Abbot* of Gethsemani: 23 August 1948

Retired from the Abbatial Office: January 1968

Lived in “Calvary Hermitage”: 1968-1977

Died at Gethsemani: Good Friday 17 April 1987

Buried at Gethsemani: 20 April 1987

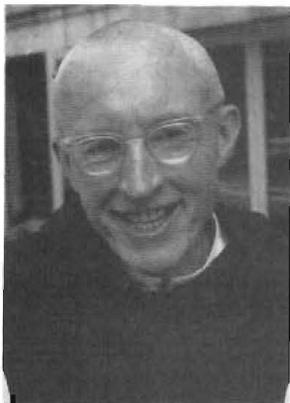
With the passage of Dom James Fox, Sixth Abbot of Gethsemani, there is a keen realization that we have come to the end of an era in the history, not only of Gethsemani, but perhaps also of the whole Order. As many of you know by now, after several months of ailing health, Dom James passed through death to life on Good Friday, April 17, 1987. His last mass was on Holy Thursday in his infirmary room, and, on the evening of Good Friday, he quietly passed on to the Lord about the time of his daily Eucharist. His abbatial coat-of-arms reads “*Deus Crucifixus*” which carries a deeper significance now in the face of his own death in imitation of the Lord on Good Friday. He had celebrated his 90th birthday last December 10th.

Since there were a number of our Cistercian Abbots and Abbesses who wanted to participate in the Funeral Liturgy, and because he died on Good Friday, it was decided to have a combined Vespers-Eucharistic celebration on Easter Monday afternoon. Abbot Timothy Kelly was Principal Celebrant and former Abbot Flavian Burns, now serving as Superior of Assumption Abbey in the Ozarks, returned to preach the Homily. Then at the end of the Mass, just before the final burial rites, Archbishop Thomas Kelly of Louisville, who concelebrated with Auxiliary Bishop Charles Maloney, stepped forward to speak on behalf of the Church in Kentucky, and its debt of gratitude to Dom James for all he had done for the local Church. Archbishop Kelly's Eulogy reminded us again of the passage of an era, as had Dom Flavian's Homily, recalling his many accomplishments during his twenty years as Abbot of Gethsemani, especially his intervention in the General Chapter of 1965 which permitted the eremitical life to flourish once again in the Order. Quite fittingly, Dom James was buried next to Father Louis [Thomas Merton] in the community cemetery.

The Bach organ prelude, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," set the tone of Easter hope and joy, which was one of Dom James' characteristics. The Alleluias which followed helped to dissipate the sorrow over the loss of a Father who served this community faithfully for two decades. The Church was filled with many people from the Louisville and Bardstown areas, including some of our "alumni" and their families, who had come to pay their last respects to this man of God.

Dom James was founding Father of the Holy Spirit Abbey at Conyers, Georgia, in 1944, and it was appropriate for Holy Spirit's Abbot and a group of monks from Conyers to be present for the Funeral Liturgy. Besides the Abbots from New Melleray, Spencer, Holy Cross and New Clairvaux, the Abbesses of Wrentham and Mississippi came to share in this historic event.

May his great soul rest now in God's eternal peace!



DOM JAMES FOX

Photo by John Howard Griffin