

## *RUN TO THE MOUNTAIN:*

### FOUR MORE JOURNAL ENTRIES by THOMAS MERTON

Editor's Note by **Patrick Hart, OCSO**

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In dealing with the transcriptions of Thomas Merton's writings, one is often confused with the problem of an original version along with a secondary redaction or even a third amplified text of a given work, often to satisfy the censors of the Order. We find this same pattern in the pre-monastic journals. When visiting St. Bonaventure University's Library Archives in 1990, an effort was made to see all the various manuscripts and transcriptions that are housed there. The two holographic journals which Mark Van Doren had given the Library shortly after Merton entered the monastery at Gethsemani are original documents. For the missing period around the time of the Cuban journey (spring of 1940), I was shown "The Fitzgerald File" with transcriptions of Merton's Cuban journal entries as well as other fragments of reworked journal entries, novels and articles along with some drawings.

With the assistance of Robert Lax whom I visited at Patmos, Greece, in 1992, each page of the transcriptions was examined so to determine whether it was the "raw" journal entry, or a revised and reworked redaction done at a later date. What appears in *Run to the Mountain* is what we considered the original entries, the primary experience. To my surprise the mysterious "Brown Journal," which I heard about after the publication of the book, contains some transcriptions from Merton's journal, dated entries which coincided with the pages Merton had torn out of the journal and presumably discarded. We are indebted to Dr. Paul Spaeth, Library Director at St. Bonaventure University, for calling these omissions to our attention.

What follows are the four transcriptions of journal entries that were discovered in "The Brown Journal." We hope that they can be incorporated into future editions of the journals. These transcriptions are from the original journal which no longer exists. It was suggested that they be published in *The Merton Seasonal* so that Merton readers would have access to these entries without having to wait for a new edition of *Run to the Mountain* to appear.



BROTHER PATRICK HART  
 "Reflecting a Tradition"  
 Painting by Jim Cantrell, 1994

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**1) July 13, 1940. Olean**

[Note: 1941 is the year given by Merton, but the text leads one to believe it was actually 1940, when he was spending the summer at the cottage which belonged to Bob Lax's brother-in-law, Benjamin Marcus.]

At noon I went out to sit in the bright sun and write, but the sun was too bright to sit and write in.

The paper says we will all be in the army by October 1st. Nobody has beaten any drums, and probably nobody would believe them if they did.

All I know is that the weather today was bright like the fall of the year: bright and cool. Last night, the night was cold, and a lot like a night in fall, with the sky very full of bright stars. You could have been led to imagine that the cars climbing the hill were on their way back from football games.

Now, very clear, from down in the valley, comes the sound of barking dogs.

I haven't read any of the books I brought up this hill a month and a half ago.

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**2) July 23, 1941. St. Bonaventure**

“Son, I believe not thine own affection that now is, for it soon shall be changed into another . . . But above all these things standeth the wise man and well taught in spirit, taking no heed what he feels in himself, nor on which side the wind of unstableness bloweth, but that all the intention of his mind may profit to the due and best end. For so he may abide, one and the same, unshaken, with the simple eye of intention directed to Me without ceasing, among so many divers chances.”

*Imitation of Christ 3:38*

This is the whole of ethics, from a psychological standpoint. It is the only thing anybody needs to surely know how to do, in order to be happy, and holy, which are exactly the same thing. It is saying in psychological terms, “Forsake everything, take up thy cross, and follow Me!” It is saying what the following of Christ means, in anybody's experience, and what forsake everything means: and it gives the reason why we have to forsake everything, psychologically.

No matter how we feel, subjectively, happy or sad, devout or not, healthy or sick, our feelings are unimportant, but our intentions are all that matter, if they are still directed only to God. And they are directed to Him when they drive us always to do good actions, to think good things, according to God's commandments and counsels.

This also is the basis of the *credo ut intelligam* [I believe so that I can understand] in philosophy. If philosophy is to be the search for truth, instead of mere curiosity, it must go out with this humility and this obedience to God: ignoring everything that merely pleases or flatters or amuses us, or merely defeats somebody we dislike. Unless we possess this humility and intense singleness of vision, we go to find truth somewhat like those Jews who “sometimes came into Bethany to Martha and Mary not for Jesus alone, but for they would see Lazarus.”

### 3) November 9, 1941.

Baudelaire was never really comprehensible to me until I became a Catholic. He is not intelligible unless you are aware of what it is to love God, and what it is to consciously rebel against God, believing Him to exist to be rebelled against. When I lived in my mild, anarchic, Epicurean universe at the age of sixteen I could hardly see what Baudelaire was talking about. I thought I knew what he meant by *ennui*. If I had for one moment felt at that age the *ennui* of Baudelaire instead of the *ennui* of anybody who was ever sixteen, I would have died on the spot and crumbled into ashes.

I had the pleasure of finding out later something of what he was talking about, however: but I didn't understand what it was either until more recently still.

To understand the degradation he describes, you have to know at the same time the infinitesimally short distance between grace and sin, life and death, which is, at the same time, the immensely large, the infinite distance between heaven and hell.

There is a certain terrific incorruptibility about Baudelaire's writing and his clarity in hell that makes his writing about damnation almost holy in its honesty. He has a poem on the denial of St. Peter that kills me with sorrow and anguish and I can hardly read it, it is so terrible: and its terror is that it is the denial of St. Peter seen from the point of view of Judas, and *praised*.

—Ah Jesus, souviens toi du Jardin des Olives!  
 Dans ta simplicité tu priais à genoux  
 Celui qui dans son ciel riait au bruit des clous  
 Que d'ignobles bourreaux plantaient dans tes chairs vives.

[Ah Jesus, is that memory still fresh—  
 How in the Garden of Olives guilelessly you prayed  
 To Him who in his heaven, undismayed,  
 laughed at the sound of nails that pierced your flesh?]

It combines all the desolation of the “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me!” with the terrible twist of meaning that this is how the cry sounded in hell: hell, which did not understand, believed that Christ's cry was hell's victory, and began to sympathize with Him triumphantly as if he were no more than a man, and a failure.

But it is that actual cry: the cry that shook heaven and earth and hell, and Baudelaire, in hell, heard it: which many of us, in grace, never bother to listen to!

Putting down Baudelaire I realized that the whole of Dante's *Inferno* is nothing but a schoolboy's fancy compared to what is described in the *Fleurs du Mal*. Dante fancies himself in a kind of hell, and described it according to the textbooks. And all the other writers who described the howling of the damned and their terrible torments have been silly compared to Baudelaire who saw that the most terrible thing about hell was the attractiveness of what is horrible, and not its unattractiveness!

In all evil, there is something holy perverted. The dialectic between the good that underlies evil and the evil into which this good is perverted is frightful. In every evil act of Baudelaire's life, God was present to remind him of exactly what he was doing, who he was crucifying. That is the greatness and the terror of the *Fleurs du Mal*, and it is proved by the fact that Baudelaire finally admitted it, and gave in to God [whom] he had killed all his life.

And anybody who can't see the intimate connection between Baudelaire's love of evil and his return to the love of God, had best leave him strictly alone. What terror is in that book! God, save me!

To fear to lose God is the worst of all fears — it is [at] the same time the most salutary and the silliest. We can only lose Him by our own stupidity and ill will. To know how great is our own stupidity and weakness is to have everything in the world to fear, but to know the strength of God's grace is to have nothing in the world to fear. As long as we live, we remain balanced between fearlessness and terror.

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#### 4) November 17, 1941

It was a nice sunny day, to be a pilgrim and an exile. I went into town and deposited my monthly paycheck in the bank: which did nothing whatever to make me happy. For, in spite of the sun, there is no real peace in this place, only inertia, and inertia is never the same as peace: peace is a kind of *active* order and harmony. It is vital, and not inert.

Everything seems to be totally neutral. Not unhappy people, who are not happy either, stand in the sun and talk about absolutely nothing; and time passes. Sun shines in the windows of the stores, upon the big gaudy showcards, upon the grins of the hefty, moronic blonde queens (always the same empty grins, everywhere, as if it were a blasphemy not to be grinning all the time) as they point their cardboard hands at the refrigerators and the electric ranges, or salute (and grin falsely, still) as if to say: "We are ready, Uncle Sammy, with our bottles of ketchup, our cheap toothbrushes, our ersatz good humor and cheap products, to support anything so long as we only have to make faces and never have to think, as long as we live."

It flashed into my mind a comparison between the inertia here, which is spiritual, and the inertia of any small town in Europe, which might be economic. But economic inertia is no inertia at all compared to this, which is really deadly. And even though there is no end of spiritual inertia in Europe (especially in England), that stagnation doesn't seem so bad in places where there are some signs that there was some life in the past, once. On the other hand, when the spiritual decay of something that was once very vital sets in, it is more terrible than the inertia of something that was never really lived at all. (I just remembered Oxford and Cambridge.)

There is often no real reason for preferring one place to another: metaphysically, it doesn't matter what town you happen to be in; you can work out your salvation in it, and find peace there if you want to, because the peace we need we have to look for in ourselves.

Psychologically, there are great differences between places, though, and the limits they put upon your own spirituality are often very significant. I am beginning to think it was good, being quiet here for a year, but now, perhaps, I have used up the resources for recollection that the mere inertia of the place gave me. Maybe if I stayed here, what I now possess as peace would cease to deepen itself, and turn into inertia (if such a thing is possible.)

Perhaps there is in place a certain value: they make it possible for you to seek and find certain things in your own soul. When you have found them, you begin to know the place has served you: and if the place is pleasant and pretty doesn't mean much anymore: it has only one further value: the value of a sacrifice. The only good thing that can be done with the place, the type of life, is to give it up. Renounce the temptation to keep what you have got as if it were now a possession, and hold on to it in inertia.

There was a rich young man in the Bible who had learned to keep all the commandments. Being rich, he had nevertheless used his riches wisely and justly. But they had done him all the service they could: they had only one further service, the value they would have if he freely renounced them, and gave everything to the poor. Unless he did this, from this point on, all his justice would be mere inertia., and to a Christian, inertia must be intolerable — it is hiding the talent that will become useless as soon as it is idle!

Christ told the young man what he should do. But he loved his security, and loved the peace that had already ceased to be peace (since he was restless enough to ask what to do) and become inertia. He turned away in sorrow, says the Gospel, for he had great possessions. And yet most Catholics who frequent the sacraments are "good people." Some are pharisees, no doubt, because there are pharisees everywhere where

pride is possible, and that is everywhere on earth. But most practicing Catholics are good, worthy men and women, not willfully unkind, nor more nervous and short tempered than anybody else, often much less so — but what is all this? These things are insults: to say Christians are *no less* uncharitable than everybody else. If they are not men who are consumed with the intense desire to love God and their neighbor, they are salt without savor. If they merely are in a sort of negative state of grace, not doing any wrong but not doing any good either, are they actually in grace at all? What about the man who took the talent and buried it? What will happen to him when the Lord comes and asks what we have done with our talents that he left with us? What will happen to us if the grace in us doesn't bring forth any fruit and is allowed to remain idle from our own lack of work and of charity?

When the aim we know is our highest aim in life, the salvation of our souls by means of loving God and our neighbor, is followed after with so much indifference by us (at best we merely keep our of a state of sin), how will the writing of poetry ever command any intense devotion from us?

No doubt we mean furiously to be good poets, and rage about our literary opinions, just the way we fume over religious and political arguments too: we have enough energy to argue, but not enough to act. We can roar and rave against communists, but we have not the strength to go out and be charitable to the poor. We can rage against atheists, but we do not try to become saints ourselves, and we rage against the writers who are said to be technically good but write about things that really hurt us and offend us (like Joyce), but we do not devote ourselves to learning how to write, or even to *read* like Joyce did, and great writers must. We want it to be easy. We want to learn to be saints without giving up our whole lives to the Love of God.

In the same way, we think we can learn to be writers without loving the best and deepest and greatest poetry as a total and intense experience of the whole intellect and imagination, united in an act of contemplation, for contemplation means nothing to us any more, either spiritually or intellectually!

The one Catholic writer in this century who knew that being a writer meant following a vocation through tribulation and poverty and persecution was Leon Bloy. And Eric Gill went about being an artist with the same kind of attitude, too, prepared to suffer anything for what he knew was true and good and holy.