

Lines to a Monk

(An Entertainment)

By **Rev. Eamonn D. O Sullivan**

Rev. Eamonn D. O Sullivan (1919-1966) was a priest of the Diocese of Helena, Montana. Ordained in 1944, he served in parishes in Butte (his hometown), Kalispell, Frenchtown, Stevensville and Whitehall, the latter two as pastor. He apparently wrote the following lighthearted "invitation" to Thomas Merton after reading of Merton's "vocation crisis" in The Sign of Jonas, and Merton responded in the same vein. Both sets of verses, found in the Merton Center archives, are published here for the first time, Merton's lines with the permission of the Merton Legacy Trust.

Thomas À Gethsemani
 Baits the cowl with poetry,
 Who would clap each God-ward man
 To hell or go Cistercian,
 Saves for cigarettes a curse
 Bleak as T. S. Eliot's verse;
 Might his better blasts address
 To his indecisiveness.
 Still tempts heaven every time
 Thomas puts his hand to rhyme;
 Still is not entirely sure
 Writing verse is for the pure.
 Fear of the Carthusian louse
 Keeps him from the Charterhouse.

Thomas, is it the devil's ruse
 Tempts you, bookly, go Chartreuse
 Or stay Trappist? Why not, man,
 Cast with me, Diocesan?
 Dante, grant you, boiled in hell
 Parish clerks – but monks as well.
 Geoffrey Chaucer, who I hear
 Banged your friar across the ear,

Sent not to *rede helle down*
 Any *persoun of a toun*.
 Thomas, Thomas, why the fuss?
 Simon Peter's one of us.

Abelard, who unsettled so
 Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux,
 Later came to know this fact
 By the desert fathers back'd:
 Prudent clerics learn to flee
 Maids who'd learn Theology.
 (Peter, having had his fling,
 Went Cistercian, solving nothing).
 Devils not the least deceive
 Those the parish care would leave.
 Ars' own curé, but for God,
 Might have died Cistercian shod.
 (Even I might not be saved,
 If I "this? or that?" behaved).

Thomas, when the monthly bills
 Dwarf the everlasting hills,
 When a Ladies-Aid debate,
 Tempts me from the higher state,
 Tempts me to the easy way:
 Making verse and making hay,
 Vaguely picturèd on wain,
 Faceless, lest some think me vain.
 Or, aft, enjoying in a wood
 My daily photo's solitude,
 Juan De La Cruz calls me not;
 Matthew, Mark and Luke I've got;
 Each a stout Diocesan.
 (That is not to slander Juan –
 Nor you, Thomas.) Pray for light
 As a holy Pastor might.

Thomas, you could stand the gaff!
 Courage! Earn the epitaph:

Thomas Merton
 Happy Man
 Died a good
 Diocesan.

– Eamonn O Sullivan, Priest

On one point, Eamonn, you're not right
 The louse, Sir, is a cenobite
 Indeed I think I have been bitten
 Eighty times since you have written
 The main suggestion of your poem
 Tempts me from my Trappist hoem
 Such advice no doubt surprisin'
 Opens up a new horizon.
 I may not earn that epitaph
 But you at least have made me laugh.

– Thomas Merton