

THE GIFT OF THOMAS MERTON REMEMBERED

(On the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of His Passing)

by **Frank X. Tuoti**

O Merton, brother-friend, quick as a fleeting Night Office, a full score years and five have passed since, on holy Buddhist soil, wired lightning struck you down (Bangkok River's banks still bleed in sorrow).

Would I now be bound tight to Christ if not for the shackles of your iron words, glowing hot from the furnace of your spirit-mind?

My memory, brother-friend, clear as a Kentucky summer sky, still can see you striding briskly along the mosaic pathways of Gethsemani's cloistered corridors, your steps quick and energetic while other white-robed monks moved with deliberate slowness, eyes solemnly cast down (your eyes on the verge of merriment!). What hidden secret animated your twenty-seven Trappist years?

Memory's ears still can hear the clacking of your ancient typewriter as, in flashback, I pass your office in the old guest house—you hunting and pecking letters into grace-filled words which, for legions, would become spirit and life. (Were those clacking sounds I heard the very words which would later turn me inside out?)

O Merton, brother-found—most famous Cistercian since glorious St. Bernard—your humility cast you low, making you indifferent, even self-derisive of your world-wide fame (crowned by a special gift from saintly Pope John).

Your terrible honesty often shames and frightens me, exposing what is false and vapid and unreal about me. Intercede for me, O brother-friend, and win for me some small share of your honesty and humility which alone can rescue the God-child in me—and slay this pitiful exterior imposter which prances about as real.

O brother Merton, most human of men, send waves of laughter down upon us and save us from our deadly seriousness and endless self-preoccupation. Powerfully remind us that we are truly the Father's very cherished own, free and unfettered in Christ, bound and judged by no law except the law of love. Send us wisdom dressed in kindly humor.

Brother-friend, almost unnoticed have sixty-five years suddenly passed by, and I have still to climb your seven storied mountain. I am slowed by teach-



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erous icy pride, driven back by avalanches of self-seeking, delayed by all too convenient level ledges where I take excessive rest and comfort (safe from the Spirit's promptings).

It is too late now to escape you, brother Merton, guru-friend—much, much too late. I will read your searing iron words again and try again once more, once more try again, and still again once more. I will stretch out one more arm's length higher, and strain to step upon one more higher jutting crag. Looking neither back or up ahead, I dare not count the mountains of the seven I must yet to climb.

(Dedicated to my brothers at the Abbey of Gethsemani)