

## A Life of Service for Others

### Homily for the Funeral Mass of Brother Patrick Hart – February 28, 2019

By **Timothy Kelly, OCSO**

(Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7; John 19:17-18, 25-30)

We have gathered this afternoon to remember Brother Patrick Hart. It is the appropriate thing to do because we know that Brother Patrick would remember each of us. Brother was always a most thoughtful and considerate person – looking for ways to make connections, to bring persons together, to develop a project to complete the publishing of Merton’s works, or just to have persons share interests and push their horizons. The Gospel reading is very appropriate. Brother Patrick had begun his spiritual quest with the Brothers of the Holy Cross at Notre Dame. In that context, through Merton’s autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Brother Patrick’s heart was opened to the monastic way of living the Gospel. He entered the choir monks’ novitiate here at Gethsemani and transferred to the lay brothers a year later. It is the last section of our Gospel which seems to touch Brother Patrick’s way of following the Gospel. The violence of Jesus’ solitary death for our salvation is presented in the first lines of the Gospel and is balanced, not softened, by the reality of the women and probably St. John and Nicodemus who were at the foot of the cross, who remained with Jesus, who wanted to care for him in his last hour. These persons were faithful to the one in whom they believed.

When I remember Brother Patrick it is in the context of serving others who were not necessarily deserving of such service. Brother Patrick was my secretary for twenty-seven years and so had many opportunities to practice patience and bear with the incompetence of his abbot. After the example of the faithful followers at the foot of the Cross, Brother Patrick was always in the background doing what was necessary, making up for the omissions of others.

I remember an incident when Brother Patrick was at the Generalate in Rome and there were six student-monks of Gethsemani resident at the Generalate. The seven of us would get together after the noon meal on occasion. After complaining about the meal and the Father Master of the Students the topic turned to the common source of our anxiety, our abbot. On this particular occasion as we exchanged episodes that sounded a little like a game of “Can you top this?” Brother Patrick abruptly left the group. Later I asked him about his sudden departure from the gathering. With a certain passion he pointed out the selfishness and the lack of respect in the conversation of the group. He acknowledged his gratitude not only for what the abbot, Dom James Fox, had done for him but also the service of the abbot to the Order



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and in particular the opportunity that he provided to each of us, the students. Brother Patrick did not think it possible for him to confront the students as a group but shared his position with us individually. This is the Gospel witness-gift that Brother Patrick offers each of us – faithfulness to the person who had encouraged him; service to his brothers in teaching by example and support of others just because they are brothers and sisters in following Jesus.

It was almost a mission that Brother Patrick took upon himself when Abbot Flavian entrusted him with the responsibility of the Merton legacy and to work in collaboration with the Trust that Merton had established for his literary work, and with the archives housed at what is now Bellarmine University. This responsibility did have its perks, since it meant working with Mrs. Tommie O’Callaghan and sharing her dynamism and culinary creativity. Brother Patrick was untiring in locating new Merton material for publication, bringing scholars together on various aspects of Merton’s work. Brother even took responsibility for doing some editing of the letters and journals while he searched



for competent persons to continue the work. Perhaps the most comprehensive and somewhat controversial work was the publication of the Merton journals and letters. There was a great deal of anguish about the amount of editing that should be done to these texts. The final decision was to publish them as they were written.

Granted, that in the midst of the worries and concerns there were opportunities that Brother Patrick relished – meeting with friends and colleagues of Merton’s and forging friendships that would support the Merton legacy and Merton’s message of Christian peace and justice for our world, and the call that each person live from the depths of the true self that is the foundation of contemplative prayer.

We are here this evening to express our appreciation for our Brother Patrick and his life of service for others. Be it to editors and publishers, university presidents and archivists, a student with an initial interest in Merton and needing encouragement – serving in the monks’ refectory or cleaning the wash room or correcting an abbot’s blunders. We remember our brother who always remembered us. We remember our Brother Patrick as we celebrate the Eucharist, the mystery of Jesus giving his life that we might live in eternity. We realize like Brother Patrick, who lived from the example of Jesus, that it is only in giving our life for others that we will have life.