

Notes Recovered from a Search for Sanctity

By Josh Dugat

I promise to pay Ally Fagan one hundred Dollar for the hire of negro man name Able
Abbot Eutropius Proust (January 1853)

The very stones and beams are all befriended
By cleaner sun, by rarer birds, by lovelier flowers.
Thomas Merton: "A Letter to My Friends" (1941)

The very stones will cry out from the wall and the beam will respond from the woodwork.
Habakkuk 2:11

Cain said to his brother Abel,
Let us go out to the field.
The field is what was here
before the chapel. The world
was here before the field.
It is hard to find a place
to hide from God. It is hard
to find a place beyond the world.
There are at least two kinds
of silences. Only one is permanent.
Only one can work to sanctify
the others. That is a statement
of faith, not certainty. The greater silence
knows more than the poet
ever will, and, in time, subsumes
the poet and the lesser silences
unto itself. It is a cycle
only inasmuch as it is helpful
to be understood as such.

Josh Dugat is a former high school teacher, park ranger and wildland firefighter. Born and raised in Texas, he is now living with his wife and son in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he teaches with the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project. This poem was written after a 2018 retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, based on an 1853 letter from its founding abbot to a local landowner, reproduced in Dianne Aprile's *The Abbey of Gethsemani: Place of Peace and Paradox*, which reveals that the monastery church was built in part by slave labor.



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I barely understand
how brick is made. Sand
and lime, water, clinker.
All winter, clay amends
in silent labor. The ground
does not cry out. Maple wilts its skin
to paper. Slick as meat, a shape slips
in the mold. To make a brick.
To cast a stone. Your fingerprints
adorn the vertebrae and sternum
of the church. And what else?
Glints of beebalm in the spring.
Your sweat and knuckle hair,
chipped fingernails. The faintest
folds in drying matter,
bending to your breathing –
trace of morning's kiss
from your beloved, whistle on your lips
leftover from the lilting
conversation with a killdeer. Something
whispered to your brother.
Who gets to say what singing is,
and isn't? It is a statement of faith,
not certainty, to say something
can be doing both at once.