

the catholic peace fellowship

An educational service conducted by Catholic members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation

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November 13, 1967

The Rev. Thomas Merton
Abbey of Gethsemani
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Tom:

Grateful for the comment on the Constitution on Church and the Modern World, which is so wonderfully brief and well focused. I'll look forward to that issue of The Catholic World.

The FOR-sponsored poetry reading at Town Hall last night was unforgettable. It seldom happens to me in public gatherings, but I actually was so immersed in the readings that I lost all sense of time. One of the poems that particularly struck me turned out to have been published in The Hudson Review, same summer issue that held your journal extract. Can't now remember the poet's name--he hadn't been on the program but turned up; looks like a Russian, with a shock of dark, thick hair falling over his brow, and his profile's like Pasternak. So much like my image of Pasternak, only as in youth. The poem was entitled Porcupine or something like that. Mark van Doran also read and was splendid. There is an immediate sense of trust, even friendship with him.

Linda walked out on mass for the first time in her life yesterday. Usually we go to Emmaus House for the Sunday liturgy there, which, though not particularly canonical, in fact not even remotely canonical, is something we can participate in with love and presence. But yesterday the schedule was complex and Linda wanted to make a go at turning back to the old days of daily communion, vestments, patterned movement, predictable vibrations. Of course it didn't work. Suddenly it all looked so very military. The commentator saying, Stand up, Sit down, Kneel, Next we will sing; and everyone behaving sadly like ornamented cattle. That wasn't meant rudely or bitterly by her either. While assuredly most people there would turn out, in their homes, to be real people, somehow lovable, and least actual and interesting, in the mass environment they seemed robbed of whatever personhood and imagination was still surviving. The text--"I think thoughts peace and not of affliction"--was somehow linked to the 40 Hours and parishioners were urged to keep Jesus company. No conclusions to offer, just thought you might find it interesting.

Jim

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