

particularly like the idea of "minute vacations"; space for a warm drink, a piece of music, or a good look at the sky.

The fact that all this takes place within a pocket sized book with a text of 109 pages means that there is enough time to read this splendid and significant book, which could change your life.

Michael Woodward

John Dear, S.J., *The Sound of Listening: A Retreat Journal from Thomas Merton's Hermitage*. pp. 126, New York: Continuum, 1999. ISBN: 0826411894. \$13.95.

The Jesuit priest and peace activist John Dear recounts in this small but beautifully written book a week-long retreat he spent at the Abbey of Gethsemani, for the most part staying in the hermitage Thomas Merton occupied for the final years of his life. Dear combines his Ignatian spirituality and activist lifestyle with the monastic ethos in a deeply moving, intimate and challenging way. He shares insights from his life and spirituality leading the reader onward in their own spiritual journey in a way reminiscent of Merton's own autobiographical style. But this is no false imitation of Merton, it is a genuine spiritual journey Dear is sharing and a journey I felt I could really relate to in combining my own busy life with a strong attraction to monastic spirituality.

Early on in Dear's retreat when a monk turns up at the hermitage to help him fix the wood-burning heater Dear asks for any advice he might be able to offer, referring to the heater, but in a Zen-like misunderstanding the monk offers him a Zen koan to ponder instead: "What is the sound of listening?" (55) This occupies Dear for the rest of his retreat as he listens to God in the scriptures, in the nature that surrounds him at Gethsemani and through his friends and work as he reflects in his retreat on his everyday life. As his retreat draws to a close he prays that he may be able to "live always in the inner house of peace, and pursue the sound of listening." (119) as he returns to the challenges of his life in the city serving the poor and needy.

*15 Days of Prayer with Thomas Merton*. by André Gozier, O.S.B. pp. 97, Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1999. ISBN: 076480491X. \$7.95.

This book, as the title suggests, is a series of meditations designed to provide the reader with 15 days of guided prayer using Thomas Merton as the guide. It is a very different approach to Merton's spirituality than the one provided by John Dear. Over the course of 15 days the reader is introduced to a wide

range of themes in Merton's writing - monk, hagiographer, poet, protester, spiritual master, singer of psalms, and precursor of interreligious dialogue. Each day begins with a focus point, a succinct quotation from Merton, then a short essay exploring the day's theme and concludes with a few questions for reflection.

After a promising introduction I found the early chapters of this book dry and uninspiring, especially considering the spiritual gems available to the author. This was particularly so in the sections exploring the daily themes. These were generally too cerebral and lacking in inspiration or reflection. They also were preachy and, at times narrow. I was reminded more of the old fashioned preached parish retreat rather than the meditative *lectio divina* to which Merton's writing naturally lends itself.

Originally written in French some of the original spirit may well have been lost in translation. Some of the later chapters were a little more inspiring, though the language remained stilted, and the book as a whole lacked the enthusiasm, the spirit, evident in *The Sound of Listening*.

*The Abbey of Gethsemani: Place of Peace and Paradox: 150 Years in the Life of America's Oldest Trappist Monastery*. by Dianne Aprile. pp. 246, Louisville, Kentucky: Trout Lily Press, 1998. ISBN: 0964280213. \$39.95.

Dianne Aprile's book was born from a couple of visits to Gethsemani to write a magazine article for a newspaper in Louisville. From this visit her attraction to the monastic life and her interest in the history of the Abbey of Gethsemani developed. Her enthusiasm for Gethsemani is evident throughout this whole book and has resulted in a beautifully produced and illustrated book which I would not hesitate to recommend to anyone keen to know more about the Trappist order in America, specifically at Gethsemani, and the life and history of the monastery where Thomas Merton chose to spend twenty-seven years of his life. The final chapters are also most interesting as they bring the history right up to date and describe how the abbey and community have changed in the years since his death.

The first two chapters trace the development of monasticism from St. Antony and the Desert Fathers, through Benedict to the development of the Cistercian Order, its subsequent reforms, and then its spread to the new world after the upheavals in France at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries leading up to the foundation of Gethsemani in 1848. Subsequent chapters of the book trace the growth and development of Gethsemani by focusing on the central roles played by its abbots from 1848 until 1998. The characters of each of the abbots comes across vividly as they