

Editorial

"How mighty they are, those hymns and those antiphons of the Easter office!" Thus Merton describes the liturgy of Easter 1943 in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. He goes on to contrast the stark, deceptively monotonous, simplicity of the Gregorian Chant with "the tricks and resources of modern music."

This calling to simplicity is one that runs through Merton's whole monastic life. As he wrote in a letter to Abdul Aziz, "There is in my heart this great thirst to recognize totally the nothingness of all that is not God."

It was a calling that also resonated with David Scott. He recounts how he first encountered Merton through reading *Thoughts in Solitude* whilst a teenager, which he found "utterly compelling", responding in his own life to such lines as "without courage we can never attain to true simplicity."

In this issue three people write about David Scott and the influence he had on their lives. Elizabeth Baron tells us of her experience of David as her parish priest for twenty years, and of his unique ministry, who, in her eyes, "had one foot in heaven and one foot on earth." Paul Pearson remembers four encounters with David that "will give some insights into the blessing he brought into my life and into the lives of countless others." And Danny Sullivan writes of his friendship with David, formed at the early beginnings of The Merton Society. Also included is a homily that David wrote for the Three Hour Service for Good Friday in 2010, 'Thomas Merton – Theologian of the Cross', seeing that "Christ became for Merton a more universal Christ."

We asked Miggy, David's wife, to suggest a poem of David's that we might include. She proposed 'Ibn Abbad woke early' which we have included along with his poem inspired by his visit to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Merton made two lifelong friends whilst at Columbia University, the artist Ad Reinhardt and the poet Robert Lax. Both men sought greater and greater simplicity in their work.

Ad Reinhardt's paintings gradually stripped out all form and colour, eventually being reduced to subtle fields of a single colour. In her article,

'A Sense of Place in Emptiness', Sylvia Grevel writes about the small black cross painting he gave to Merton which, in her words, "mirrors Merton's understanding of the True Self, that core of 'me' that is not subject to change, where my consciousness and God's consciousness are identical."

Robert Lax's poetry also showed greater and greater simplicity throughout his life, eventually stripping it down to a single word, even a single syllable, on a line. The poet Matthew Robb Brown had a brief correspondence with Robert Lax before he died, and included in this issue is Brown's heartfelt poem he wrote following news of his death. Three years later Jim Forest sent him a poem that Lax had written and sent to him in 1988, and it is included here being published for the first time.

In her article, 'How Merton's love of solitude influences us today', Karen Karper Fredette, a modern-day hermit, writes of her journey from entering the Poor Clares in 1959, leaving thirty years later to live in a solitary cabin in West Virginia, and six years later finally finding completion in a loving relationship and marriage. In their joint article, 'Merton Discerning His Svadharma', Swasti Bhattacharyya and Bernadette McNary-Zak reflect on Merton's reading of Vinoba Bhave's *Talks on the Gita*, contending that "*Talks on the Gita* provided Merton with an inter-faith framework and language for discerning his svadharma (one's personal dharma)." Also included are reviews of books on the correspondence between Merton and fellow poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and *A White Catholic's Guide to Racism and Privilege* by Daniel Horan, along with a poem by David Hodges.

It was on Easter Tuesday 1943, eighty years ago this year, that Merton was informed of the death of his brother who had died of wounds ten days earlier. In her article, 'Killed in Action', Fiona Gardner writes of the relationship between the two brothers, one she sees as "characterized by separation and loss".

That Easter Merton had revelled in all the sights and sounds of the rituals, "the bells once more on Holy Saturday", "a church that was full of warm night air and swimming in this rich luxury of odors", the "Easter invitatory that is nothing short of gorgeous in its exultation", to exclaim those Easter alleluias, "to wake up from the sleep of death with a triple 'alleluia'."

May the joy and peace of the risen Lord fill your hearts this Eastertide.

Stephen Dunhill