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EASTER 1967

Dear Friends:

It has been a beautiful warm Easter here, though the most recent news from the East Coast complains of much snow. Jim Forest wrote from his CP office in Nyack that he felt like Dr Zhivago in Siberia and Adrienne Mariani had some amusing suggestions about what might be done to discourage the ground hog from sticking his head out and being confronted with despair. Actually, however, it was eighty all afternoon here on Holy Saturday and sixty at one thirty a.m. when I got back to my cell after the Easter Vigil.

Answering letters individually gets to be more and more of a problem. Not that I am pitying myself, but just to give new correspondents some idea why I simply cannot answer letters most of the time: Besides my ordinary work I now have on my desk the following: One complete manuscript of a novel on which I am asked to comment by a publisher. A set of galleys of a book on Zen, ditto. Several chapters of a book on mysticism to read and criticize. A long statement on the Vietnam War I am supposed to sign (generally I don't sign any of these statements, because I can't read the papers or watch TV to keep up as others do). A list of twenty four magazine articles which I must either read and report on myself, or get others to summarize, for the magazine of the Order. A book review article of six or seven books about Camus, in state of outline, to be written somehow in the next week or so. At least two books to review for the magazine of the Order (I mention only the two that happen to be directly visible at the moment. There are probably others on the shelf behind me or buried under the mass of other material that confronts me.) Finally, on top of that, I have an urgent report to write on an official matter, and am requested to give this top priority. And so on. The life of a writing hermit is certainly not one of lying around in the sun or of pious navel gazing. Nevertheless there is the question of meditation which, to me, is always the first thing of all because without it the rest becomes meaningless. In such circumstances, writing letters, receiving visits and so on would simply complicate matters beyond all reasonable measure. Yet I do of course have to answer business mail, urgent requests, questions from people in a state of crisis, and all that. Carrying on an ordinary friendly correspondence is normally just out of the question. Note also that I have no secretary for correspondence, and that it is increasingly difficult to find someone in the monastery to type manuscripts. (I am most grateful to the ones who are helping me in this matter, both inside and outside the monastery.)

I recommend a very interesting and important new magazine which is being published at Cambridge (England). The first issues have just reached me. It is called "Theoria to Theory" and the purpose is to get some lively dialogue going between theologians and contemplatives on one hand and secular scientists, philosophers and humanists on the other. It is the most promising new venture of its kind that I have seen. It is edited by Anglicans and is more informal and free wheeling than the new Roman Catholic publications which still strike me as too formal and still a bit triumphalist. (There is of course a new aggressive triumphalism of the left just as there is an old stuffy triumphalism of the right). Part of the editorial in the first issue reads as follows: "To those who...still hope there might be something in Christianity or indeed in any other religion we would simply say: Things aren't as hopeless as you might think. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any of the philosophies currently in use. Nil illegitime carborundum, which is

hot dog latin for, "Don't let the bastards grind you down." The magazine can be obtained from 9 Marion Close, Cambridge, England.

A friend wrote quoting a line of verse: "In the juvenescence of the year comes Christ the Tiger" and wondered if Easter was going to be like that. There is an inner strength which is "ours" yet "not ours", which can be for us or against us, depending on whether we resolve to face it and submit, or seek to evade and resist it. Easter is the season of that strength (and Easter is all year round, really). At Easter we resolve liturgically and communally to "face it" and to join this Tiger who is then our Tiger and our Lamb. (I am thinking of the two great Blake poems: "Tyger Tyger burning bright...") There is no joy but in the victory of Christ over death in us: and all love that is valid has something of that victory. But the power of love cannot "win" in us if we insist on opposing it with something else to which we can cling, on which we trust because we ourselves can manipulate it. It all depends who is in control: our own ego, or Christ. We must learn to surrender our ego-mastery to His mastery. And this implies a certain independence even of apparently holy systems and routines, official "answers" and infallible gimmicks of every kind. Easter celebrates the victory of love over everything. Amor vincit omnia. If we believe it we still understand it, because belief is what opens the door to love. But to believe only in systems and statements and not in people is an evasion, a betrayal of love. When we really believe as Christians, we find ourselves trusting and accepting people as well as dogmas. Woe to us when we are merely orthodox, and reject human beings, flesh and blood, the aspirations, joys and needs of men. Yet there is no fruit, either, in merely sentimental gestures of communion that mean little, and seek only to flatter or placate. Love can also be tough and uncompromising in its fidelity to its own highest principles. Let us be united in joy, peace and prayer this Easter and always. "Fear not" says Jesus "It is I. I am with you all days!..."

All my love, in Christ,

Thomas Merton