

JPIC 63 - APRIL 2017... Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit ... [Rule of Saint Albert]
Saudavel iha Mararomak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian ... (Regula Sto Alberto)

LATE IN THE DAY

When my dad turned 70 – an age I have now passed myself – I flew up to Brisbane from Melbourne to spend the day with him.



Leo was in good health, happily married, a man of strong faith. So what was good about being 70 I asked him? In fact I should have asked this contented man what *else* was good about being 70.

One of the things he enjoyed about being 70, he told me, was that by this time he had a very clear *perspective* on what he believed, on what was important to him. In other words he knew *who* and *what* he was.

That conversation took place more than 40 years ago. I have never forgotten what dad said and now I truly understand what he meant.

With this understanding has come another development which has surprised and pleased me. While I am still trying to improve the bits of me that need work I really don't care what people (whoever they are) think of me. I *know* who I am.

It is true that various ailments and sad events impose themselves on us as we get old (and sometimes earlier than old). But with advancing years there can also be wisdom, contentment and growing appreciation of the *gift of life*.

John Tidey, Parishioner, Our Lady of Mt Carmel and St. Joseph Parish, Middle Park/Port Melbourne.

“Older Australians are a treasure – a wealth not to be ignored. We must acknowledge the legacy of our elders as we plan for the future.”

P3, 'A Place at the Table – Social Justice in an Aging Society' Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement 2016-2017.

ACTIVE CONTEMPLATIVES ...

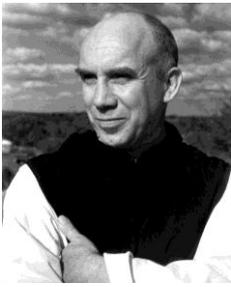
a reflection by Peter Thomas, JPIC Team

Pope Francis described Thomas Merton as one of four Americans he especially admired. The occasion was when he was speaking to both Houses of Congress in Washington, DC, in 2015. The others were Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day.

Like a lot of Catholic young men in the 1960s I was deeply influenced by Merton especially after reading, what today nearly 57 years later seems dutifully pietistic, his best-selling book, “Elected Silence”. His later books, especially those that dealt with war and peace, e.g. ‘*Cold War Letters*’ and ‘*Breakthrough to Peace*’ are the reflections of a man who sought to encourage non-violent approaches to conflict which he comfortably integrated with his monastic identity as a Cistercian monk and his vocation as a contemplative.

Merton was an admirer of Gandhi’s approach to conflict, i.e. the non-violent, life-protecting power that comes from seeking the conversion of opponents rather than their humiliation and destruction. As a monk every question about war was viewed in the light of Christ. This for Merton was the only way to achieve peace. Many of Merton’s fellow monks felt a tension between what they saw as the contemplative vocation, i.e. a hidden life of prayer and Merton’s understanding which catapulted his views, often portrayed as radical in the climate of post-McCarthyism political repression in the United States, beyond the walls of his Kentucky monastery.

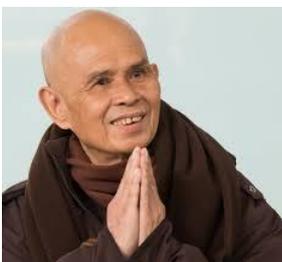
A similar tension has and does exist in the Carmelite tradition between the contemplative and active. But tension is often a catalyst for creativity. As Carmelite Titus Brandsma used to say a Carmelite is called ‘*to leave God for God*’.



Merton, who entered the Cistercians in 1941 rarely left the monastery until 1968 yet his influence through his writings and connections with those that visited him at Gethsemane made him a powerful voice in the anti-war movement.

Merton met Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist at Gethsemane Abbey in 1966. Bound by the theme of contemplation and action, Thich Nhat Hanh, popularly known as Thay meaning Teacher, is a man who even today at age 91 and recovering from a serious stroke, practices 'engaged spirituality'. Martin Luther King called Thay an apostle of peace and non-violence, his key teaching being that through meditation and mindfulness we can learn to live in the moment, a theory he espouses as the only way to develop peace both in one's self and in the world.

In 1966 Thay accepted an invitation from the Fellowship of Reconciliation at Cornell University to come to the United States. He spoke convincingly in favour of a ceasefire and negotiated settlement for the Vietnam conflict. Martin Luther King was so moved by Thay's proposals for peace that he nominated him for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize, saying, "I know of no one more worthy than this gentle monk." Merton wrote in one of his essays that, "Thich Nhat Hanh is my brother."



In 2017 Thay lives in retirement with his beloved community of over 100 monks and nuns at Plum Village near Bordeaux in France, a place that each year attracts thousands of seekers from all spiritual traditions and none.

Like the threat that hung over the world from nuclear annihilation in the 1960s and disturbed Thomas Merton, and like the menace of the Vietnam War that engaged

Thich Nhat Hanh, modern day terrorism particularly as it affects countries in the Middle East is a nightmare scenario played out daily on our television screens. A piece in the Sydney archdiocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Weekly*, 16 March 2017, reported that Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona, formerly the last head of the Archdiocese of Mosul in Iraq said, *'The best response Christians can give to the threat of Islamic State is to live genuinely Christian lives, and to not be afraid. If we as Christians live our faith exactly, they (ISIS) can't do anything. If they kill us tomorrow, or even in an hour, we have to live this moment full of joy and full of the love of Jesus Christ.'*

It seems that Archbishop Nona, now the Bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Diocese of St. Thomas the Apostle of Australia and New Zealand is following the non-violent approach to conflict as practiced by Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh. Mosul, Iraq's second city of more than 1 million is besieged on all sides as forces fight for the eradication of Islamic State from the city. The United Nations has declared the battle that has ensued over Mosul as one of the largest humanitarian disasters in history as over 200,000 have been displaced. When Islamic State forces seized control of Mosul in 2014, Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona was forced into exile.

Thomas Merton was a prolific writer for *The Catholic Worker* a newspaper founded by Dorothy Day and her contemporaries. American journalist, social activist and Catholic convert, Day began the Catholic Worker Movement as a group committed to non-violence, voluntary poverty, prayer and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry and forsaken. In 2017 the Catholic Worker Movement continues to protest injustice, war, racism and violence in all its forms. Dorothy famously wrote...



"The biggest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution that has to start with each of us."

Like Merton, Day saw war as deeply un-Christian, a denial of Christ's example and teaching. Despite misgivings from his Cistercian superiors Merton was to become a regular contributor for *The Catholic Worker* writing such stirring anti-war expression as..

"The task is to work for the total abolition of war. There can be no question that unless war is abolished the world will remain constantly in a state of madness and desperation.....Let us not forget that the supreme example of nonviolent resistance to evil is the crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in which the Incarnate Son of God destroyed sin by taking the sins of the world upon Himself and dying on the cross, while forgiving the men who were putting Him to death." (Letters to Catholic Worker)

Merton studied the Just War theory popularly espoused by the Church and came to the conclusion that it must be a defensive war declared by legitimate authority in which force is strictly limited and the greatest care is taken to protect the rights and lives of noncombatants and combatants. He adds that *"history teaches us that these*

requirements were seldom met with in practice."

Thomas Merton, the Cistercian monk and contemplative who died in 1968, one of the most influential religious figures of the last 50 years had a pre-occupation with the theme of peace; from his early position as a conscientious objector to his prophetic writings on nuclear war and non-violence. In his message for the celebration of the 50th World Day of Peace on the 1st January 2017 Pope Francis, like those prophetic voices of Thich Nhat Hanh, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King and Thomas Merton, promoted active nonviolence as a way to peace.

"When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking.....To be true a follower of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence."

[Note: Readers who wish to explore this issue more deeply are encouraged to read, "The Root of War is Fear" by Jim Forest. Published by Orbis Book 2016]

FOR YOUR CALENDAR APRIL

- 2 April - World Autism Awareness Day
- 4 April - UN Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance
- 7 April - UN Day of remembrance for Genocide in Rwanda
- 9 April - Palm Sunday - Refugee Rallies in all capital cities
- 14-16 April - EASTER
- 22- International Mother Earth Day
- 23- Divine Mercy Sunday
- 24- 1945 Opening of First UN Conference with 45 nations attending
- 25 April - ANZAC Day

PRAYERFUL REFLECTION (by Jane Goodall)

***We pray** for social justice, for the alleviation of the crippling poverty that condemns millions of people around the world to lives of misery - hungry, sick, and utterly without hope.*

***We pray** that we may learn the peace that comes with forgiving and the strength we gain in loving; that we may learn to take nothing for granted in this life; that we may learn to see and understand with our hearts; that we may learn to rejoice in our being.*

Mercy to Earth Weekend 2017

Both the celebration of **Mercy Sunday** and **Earth Day** are the on same weekend in 2017, **22 & 23 April** and to celebrate the **#Mercy2Earth Weekend** there is a global campaign to encourage Catholics to reflect on Pope Francis' important "Mercy to Earth" message and put it into action. This weekend in partnership with Catholic Earthcare Australia & Global Catholic Climate Movement has a number of special resources for you to celebrate **#Mercy2Earth Weekend**, both online from your home and in your parish or community.

[Go to the Mercy2Earth website to sign up](#)

