

Trinity Sunday A June 19, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

Thomas Merton was the most well known monk and one of the best known Catholics of the 20th century. I know many of you are familiar with him. He wrote so many books, the most famous being *Seven Storey Mountain*, his autobiography, which had a great influence on my generation. Since his tragic death in 1968 and endless stream of books have been written about him, many of them giving new insights into the man. I have been reading one called *Soul Searching, the Journey of Thomas Merton*. It basically is excerpts on particular topics from interviews of many people who knew him.

You have to know a little about his life. He was the son of two artists, was born in a village in France, his mother died when he was 5 and his father when he was 16. He never experienced a stable home life. He had a guardian in England, where he went to school, grandparents in New York, where he went to Columbia University. But he never had a real home. He converted to Catholicism, and at the age of 27 entered the Trappist Monastery of Gethsemini just outside of Bardstown, Kentucky, and lived there the rest of his life.

It was a busy time at Gethsemini, there were hundreds of monks, and he was made novice master, a time consuming job at the monastery. He was always writing, and publishing. But he longed for solitude. In silence he felt he could really find God. He had an interesting relationship with the abbot, James Fox. They were opposites, but good for each other. The abbot knew Merton so well. Merton's mind was always racing, coming up with new ideas. Once he wanted to found a Trappist Monastery in Central America. The abbot would always tell Merton, "Thomas, let's pray about that this month, we will discuss it next month." The abbot knew that by then Merton would have totally forgotten about it and moved on to a new idea.

But on silence Thomas was persistent, he wanted to build a hermitage away from the monastery and live there alone in silence. The abbot finally gave him permission to do that, and a small hermitage was built. Guess what happened? He loved it and found the solitude helpful in finding God. But he missed the community. He was always a prolific letter writer, but he became more prolific. And visitors started to come to visit, the Dalai Lama, the Berrigan brothers, and many more. He found God in solitude, but I think he found God even more in community, in people.

This is a long introduction into our feast, the Trinity, which we are celebrating today. We are made in the image and likeness of God. What is the nature of God, how do we describe God? God is one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is a community of persons who love. The Father so loved that He begot the Son. And the love between the Father and Son is so great that it is a person, the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is God in a loving community. If we are to be in the image and likeness of God, then we must be in community, loving one another.

I think of two communities today. I think of the family on this Father's Day, and I think of all the fathers of our parish. The family must be a loving community of persons who love and respect and support one another. Our fathers must model that love, and many do. The other community is the parish. It is difficult for our parish to be a loving community, it is so big, over 2,000 families. But it is something we must strive for, and within the parish there are many smaller communities like prayer groups and discussion groups. (CMF).

St. Paul in our second reading speaks to this issue. He said "Brothers and sisters, mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss."

As a parish I think we do fairly well, but could always do better. We must work on being more welcoming, more inviting, more open and understanding to one another. If we are to be more like God, we must be more loving, as God is. I will end with the way we began today and the way we begin every mass, with the greeting from Paul's letter, "The grace of Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you."