

ANOTHER STOP ON “THE ROAD TO JOY”: A LETTER

by **Thomas Merton**

May 9th 1960

To Sister Elizabeth Ann and her English IV Students,
My Dear Friends,

After all your notes and good wishes I know we are really friends, and I hope we will remain united in prayer and will see one another in heaven. There we can thank God for all His goodness, which so often remains hidden and invisible on this earth. Yet charity is a real revelation of the goodness of God, and that is why He wants us to love one another: so that thereby He may show Himself, in the mystery of Christian love, to bewildered men.

All this is just a way of saying I was very happy to read all your kind messages, and I respond to them with my heart.

Since you ask for a picture, I have dug around in the files and finally found one. It was taken ten years ago when I was slightly beat, but had a few less grey hairs than now. The little that I have is just about grey, now.

That is not what matters in life. In our world, people pay a lot of attention to looks, clothes, possessions, jobs, advancement, and what not. It is true that we have to do our work and accomplish something in life. But it is not what the world appreciates or values that really counts. It is the work we do in our own hearts, the love we give to God and to other men, that is our real life's work. That is our career.

My message to you is: always be true to the deepest and purest aspirations of your souls. Be true to your own deepest self, the real “you” the inner self that is one with God. You may not always be aware of this inmost self. But there are times when, obscurely at least, you *know* what is best in you, and you can tell what road God wants you to travel. It does not have to be anything spectacular or unusual. It may simply be what is right in front of you. But it must be a way that enables you to be true to yourself, quietly, peacefully and patiently.

Some of you may one day want to be priests or enter religion. That is good. But it is not necessary to be a priest or a nun to be a true follower of Christ. Nor is it necessary to be unfailingly “good” in the highest sense of the word. We must always try to live up to our highest ideals, but sometimes we may fail. That does not matter, as long as we pick ourselves up again and keep on going. Never get discouraged and depressed at your own limitations. They are not as bad as you may think, and God loves those who have to put up a strong fight to be faithful, even though they may not always succede [sic]. Realize that you are precious in His sight and that He really died for you on the Cross, in order to help you at all times and unite you to Himself. When you really believe this, you have no reason to be discouraged, no matter what happens. His love for us is the great reality. It is a deep and personal love, deeper and more personal than any human affection. All we need to do is to love Him in return, as best we can, with our own imperfect hearts, taking ourselves as we are. If we trust in Him, He will do the rest.

God love you, all of you. I shall keep you in my Masses and prayers.

Cordially in Christ Our Lord,
fr Louis Merton