

Four Poems

By Colum Kenny

Hurry to Mindfulness – 2009

It was not meant to be this way:
Driving to Merton's in a golf cart.

I had hoped to go gently on foot,
Deep in contemplative ease.

"Hold tight," barked Brother Greg,
Which was not necessary advice.

I couldn't have held tighter,
As he gunned that old cart downhill.

At an angle to reality then,
I had a chance to let go but clung on.

"How do monks get golf carts?" I thought,
Attempting mindlessness.

My eighty-year-old chauffeur shouted,
Told me I shudda seen the roads in Guatemala.

Crossing a stream I started to relax,
Bumping along the rising dirt track.

When the hermitage hove into sight,
So did wild turkeys. Twelve of them.

Greg braked, gave me a key and said,
"Don't drink the water, it made Merton sick."



Colum Kenny

Colum Kenny is a professor of communications at Dublin City University. His books include *Moments That Changed Us: Ireland since 1973* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005) and a collection of poetry entitled *Standing on Bray Head: Hoping It Might Be So* (Bray: Kestrel, 1995). In Spring 2009 he spent a month on retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, KY. He is married with three sons and lives in Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

Then he was gone and silence came,
No ghost of Thomas Merton on the porch.

His chapel-room was barely built
Before he died in 1968.

Jump in a golf-cart and get going,
Hurry to mindfulness.

Sext

(The monks gather for prayer seven times daily – sext is at 12.15 p.m.)

Did the blonde girl at Sext find God in Gethsemani?
It did not look like it, but then I can't really say.

She leant for a while against the hard stone wall
And maybe some hidden burden was relieved.

They came in a big yellow bus, she and her school,
On their whistle-stop tour of eminent churches.

She sniffed her nails and distracted another kid,
As the monks got ready to intone their prayers.

A small bottle of perfume, wrapped in her hand,
Suggested more on her mind than The Angelus.

Lord have mercy on this blond-haired girl,
Her skirt at least two inches higher than the rest.

Christ have mercy on all twitchy adolescents,
To whom the psalms come from a distant place.

Lord have mercy on this your slouching child,
Who rested her head on another girl's shoulder.

Salve Regina

So clement,
So loving,
So sweet.

The monks at Compline
Bidding their day adieu.

Two candles flicker
Before the Virgin.

I recognize words
My mother prayed,

When the rosary
Was said in Ireland.

This slow air written
By a monk now dead,

His Abbey brothers
Sing as antiphon:

“Hail, holy Queen,
Mother of Mercy!
Hail our life,
Our sweetness,
And our hope!
To you do we cry
(She used to say “thee”),
Poor banished children of Eve.
To you do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears
(We used to say “valley”).
Turn then, most gracious Advocate,
Your eyes of mercy toward us;
And after this our exile,
Show unto us
The blessed fruit of your womb Jesus.

O [so low and long] clement,
 O [so slow and long] loving,
 O [so exquisitely] sweet . . .
 Virgin Mary.”

Darkness.
 Silence.
 Sleep.

At the End of the Ages

“You shall not die in the bluegrass land of A. . . .
 rather the gods intend you for Elysion
 with golden Rhadamanthos at the world’s end.”

(Verses from Fitzgerald’s *Homer* inscribed by Thomas Merton in his journal, January 4, 1968, when he thought that he might be moving to a monastery in Chile. He died in Thailand on December 10, 1968, electrocuted by a fan.)

They fade away,
 As they have always faded
 From the beginning of time.

One after another,
 The sunsets blaze and dim
 And we lie down to sleep.

“Like no time at all,”
 The monk had said to me,
 His fifty-five years here.

A Mayoman priest,
 Almost eighty years old,
 Landed in old Kentucky.

This bluegrass state
 Of bright cardinal birds
 And blessed bourbon.

St Patrick’s Day,
 Singing the psalms again
 Far from Croagh Patrick.

Aged two at home –
Eucharistic Congress,
Then emigration.

We know it not,
Neither the place nor hour
Of our own end.

Nor what wind blows
At the end of the ages
That are ours.