

Forgive Me Father For I Have Sinned (at Gethsemani near Bardstown)

By **Judith Gill Milford**

In the presence of Merton
was there someone in the monastery garden
communing with tender young plants

or in the steamy kitchen stirring bay leaves
into a simmering pot –

a brother desiring only to be holy
who was led
into the sin of envy
as the words of Merton found their way
into our minds,
onto our lips?

As he wrestled yet another invasion
of weeds from rows of corn and beans
or nursed a blistered palm from
an unforgiving hoe might
the thought have crept
in that he would prefer
pen or pencil calluses?



Judith Gill Milford

Judith Gill Milford was awarded the Thomas More Press/Andrew Greeley Nonfiction Book Award and the Thomas More Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Catholic Literature in 1989 for *Are You Sure This Is Mine? A Search for God and Truth*. Her chapbook, *Surfacing*, was published in 2011 by Finishing Line Press and her poems have appeared in *Pegasus*, *The Critic*, *Kentucky Monthly*, *Paducah Life*, *St. Anthony Messenger* and elsewhere. She has recently completed a novel entitled *Dragonflies Draw Flame*. Born in New Jersey, she lives in Paducah, Kentucky with Rob, her husband of forty-eight years.

Or maybe he was the one chopping
carrots for a hearty stew
as he turned over phrases – first Merton’s
then his own – comparing the two.
Not so different. What makes
Brother Louie’s words more pleasing?
Are they more pleasing to the Lord,
or just to man?

I can appreciate
such temptation –
the purported sin of Salieri,
accustomed as I am
to the sting of mediocrity.

But he toils on in silence, this other brother,
offers up each blister, each drop of sweat
opens his face to the sun, the rain
and gives thanks.