

Report on Thomas Berry's Mass of the Resurrection

Immaculate Conception Monastery
Jamaica, New York, June 6, 2009

Patricia Monahan

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I was happy to join with other friends and former students at the Passionist Monastery in Jamaica Estates, New York, for Thomas Berry's Mass of Resurrection on Saturday, June 6, 2009. I took along Thomas's book *The Dream of the Earth* to read while I waited, but also just holding the book made me feel close to him. He had gifted me with this book at the time of its publication with the inscription "To Patricia with every best wish. May all your dreams be integral with the dream of the Earth. Thomas Berry—October 22, 1988." He had first shared his *Riverdale Papers* with me one at a time and this publication was a collection of his many essays. They were my first primer which continued to expand my consciousness one step at a time. It is comforting to read his greeting and to re-read this worn out and somewhat tattered book with all its underlined and highlighted sections. What began as awakening knowledge has become the bedrock of my consciousness and the source of my inspiration. How I treasure the memory of those precious visits.

Back to the service— As we waited in the small chapel, Sisters of St. Joseph from The Mary Louis Academy community across the street began to arrive. As a former Sister of St. Joseph, I was happy to greet them. There were also a couple of Passionist Nuns and later half a dozen Dominican Sisters of Caldwell arrived including Sister Miriam MacGillis, OP, Founder and Director of Genesis Farm, Blairstown, New Jersey. It was touching to greet Miriam because it was from her that I first heard of Thomas Berry at an National Catholic Education Convention in Boston in the mid '80s. Our warm embrace made words unnecessary.

I was most happy to meet Thomas's most faithful and loyal companion and friend—Brother Conrad Federspiel—who assisted him in every way while he was at the Riverdale Center located on the grounds of the Passionist Monastery in Riverdale, New York. We recalled my many visits and I was delighted to hear him say, "You were on the list of his ten top women." How humbling for a middle school teacher to hear such a compliment.

Back to the service—The Passionist community gathered on the elevated choir benches around the chapel walls. The remainder of the Chapel was filled. The Very Reverend Joseph R. Jones, C.P. (Provincial), was the main celebrant of the liturgy. The homilist was Rev. Stephen Dunn, C.P., who worked with Tom at the Holy Cross Centre for Ecology and Spirituality in Canada for more than twenty years and knew him for many years before that.

Father Dunn referred to Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker's comment that Thomas' life was like a brilliant rose stained glass window where each piece shone forth brilliantly. He recited the words of the Shaker song, "Tis a Gift to Be Simple...Tis a Gift to be Free" He said that Tom's life was like a great

symphony and this was the last note...but that his life will continue to play out in all those who knew him and those who will know him through what he called the GREAT WORK OF OUR TIME.

His homily (given in full text below) ended with a story of how Thomas's Grandniece discovered her Uncle Thomas and herself in a writing by Brian Swimme about Tom. This writing is indeed a fitting description of him: "A supernova pouring forth his goodness, flinging his gifts into the world. His life was a song of the universe...a dance of the galaxies...a canticle of joy." He believed in intimacy with all things and flooded all creation with his goodness. We will continue to bask in the light of the rose window that was Tom's life.

At the end of the Mass, Tom's niece, Ann Berry Somers, came to the podium. She recalled that as a child she heard about an uncle who was a priest, a college professor, an author, and scholar of history. This special uncle would visit very seldom and one day she asked her mother, "Is 'Uncle Brother' really a member of our family?" It wasn't until Thomas returned to Greensboro, North Carolina in 1995 that Ann had a chance to get to know her uncle. It was in 2003 when Tom had his stroke that Ann began visiting him each Sunday. They spoke about everything under the sun and she learned so much from him. She went on to say that Thomas had struggled these past three years, but that at the end he was surrounded by compassionate caretakers, his beloved and loyal sister Margaret, and herself. He died peacefully on Monday, June 1 at 6:30 AM. As a final gesture, Father Jones presented Ann with Tom's profession cross to hold and to cherish in his memory. It was a touching moment.

The Mass was followed by a lunch in the refectory where a young Thomas began his religious life. Toward the end of the luncheon, people were invited to share some memories. Friends and former graduate assistants shared their appreciation for Tom's presence in their lives. Miriam MacGillis stood and proposed a toast to Tom for all the good he had accomplished throughout his life. Gerry Leonard mentioned what a tremendous inspiration Thomas had been to the Montessori movement. Tom Stock from Dominican Village in Amityville, New York, spoke of Tom's inspiration to his work in the organic garden. Brother Conrad had shared, just before Mass, in the Chapel, his gratitude for the time he shared with, lived with and assisted Thomas. Dan Sheridan, Tom's assistant at Riverdale, spoke of his privilege in having Tom as mentor for his graduate dissertation on Hinduism. Sister Mary Angela from Australia spoke of Thomas picking her up in his battered Toyota from a street in New York City. Even though he had no idea who she was, he picked her up without asking any questions when she asked for his guidance. Tom has a way of being fully present to

anyone he spoke with no matter what their station in life. I remember that extraordinary quality from my own visits with him.

I have more notes scribbled on the back of some scrap paper which I can't quite make out. However, I think this much will give you a sense of what it was like to be in attendance at Thomas's funeral at the Passionist Monastery in Jamaica, New York.

We ask along with Thomas, "What time is it?" What time is it for those who knew and loved Thomas? What time is it for the Congregation of Passionist Priests and Brothers? What time is it for the Roman Catholic Church? What time is it for our precious planet as we move into the future? What time is it?



Pat Monahan and Thomas at Genesis Farm