

Greetings and Welcome

Thomas Merton lived as a Trappist monk, as we monks of Münsterschwarzach, according to the rule of Saint Benedict. So I would like to read to you from Chapter 53 – “From the reception of the guests”:

- ¹ All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25:35).
- ² Proper honor must be shown to all, especially to those who share our faith (Gal 6:10) and to pilgrims.
- ³ Once a guest has been announced, the superior and the brothers are to meet him with all the courtesy of love.
- ⁴ All humility should be shown in addressing a guest on arrival or departure:
- ⁵ By a bow of the head or by a complete prostration of the body, Christ is to be adored because he is indeed welcomed in them.
- ⁶ The abbot with the entire community shall wash their feet.
- ⁷ After the washing they will recite this verse: God, we have received your mercy in the midst of your temple (Ps 48:10).
- ⁸ Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them especially Christ is received; our natural privileging of the rich means that they are used to our respect.

So one should receive the guests according to the rule of Saint Benedict. I want to spare you taking off your shoes now and washing your feet – but what Benedict meant, we take very seriously! With this in mind, I would like to welcome you dear guests to the Symposium on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the death of Thomas Merton here in the Abbey of Münsterschwarzach. With you Christ is welcomed again into the monastery, for that we are grateful and we try (!) to receive you like Christ.

Who is the human being who loves life and wishes to see good days?

asks Saint Benedict in his Rule.

When you hear that and answer “I”, then God says to you: Do you want true and everlasting life, Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from cheap talk! Avoid evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it!

Thomas Merton was such a human being who wanted to live well, and wanted to see good days, so he went to the monastery and became a monk. In silence, by choosing silence, he breathed the presence of God. This is the basic habit of us monks: the constant being in the presence of God – which makes God visible in the world today.

Thomas Merton said:

Monks must resemble trees that live silently in darkness and purify the air through their life-giving presence.

How urgently the world needs this cleansing, how urgently it needs contemplation, but also the action that witnesses and testifies – as it was given to Thomas Merton by his writing!

The world, which seems to be drifting apart in all areas, needs to hear with the ear of the heart, as Saint Benedict says, the deep listening to one another, and in this sense the obedience that Saint Benedict meant.

I wish you all this listening with the ear of the heart in these days of the symposium!