

Words for my brother, Thomas

Brian O'Shea

John Paul had taken part in a raid on Mannheim. Shortly after taking off on Friday, April 16th, the aircraft he was in left the bomber formation with some engine malfunction caused by icing. When the bomber crashed into the Channel, John Paul's back was broken. He survived some hours in a rubber dinghy, delirious, calling for water when there was none to give him. He was dead long before the others were picked up, five miles off the English Coast. They had buried him at sea.

I thirst.

In and out of an uneasy consciousness,
glimpsing shadows and reality,
adrift in a sea of loneliness.

I was always lost, estranged even, from you
and your circle, envying your easy friendships from afar.

From our childhoods to maturity, our separate roads.

And then, the day of my First Communion,
alone again, in the lofty heights of the tribune.

United. Your gesture of welcome,

and a sure way down the abbey stairways

Is found, and we bask in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Yet still longing for your approval,

of me and the wife I have found.

You've brought me home.

Reconciliation as part of the journey inwards.

Surrender.

My pain is my Gethsemani

On this Lenten night.

My sharing in His passion and somehow yours.

I see that easy smile of yours,

as if you see another bomber plane

that will bear you home too.

United in irony and a perverse world that

should hear your indelible pleas.

Restless pilgrim,

I hear your future words,

'There is no way of telling people that they are all
walking around shining like the sun.'

Well, this isn't a street corner in Louisville.

Smile on my plight, and yet . . .

I know the everlasting Easter of the heart awaits me.

Farewell, dear brother,

I too, must 'disappear from view'.

The initial quotation describing the death of Thomas Merton's brother John Paul in 1943 is taken from Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (London: Sheldon Press, 1986), p. 222.

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